

THE MIND HAS MOUNTAINS

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by

JESSIE RUTHERFORD



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In every man there is a king and a pauper. Your
father always spoke to the king, and the king
came out.

SIGNE TOKSVIG

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

AS DR. WINIFRED ORWIN sipped her coffee, the terrifying weight of uncertainty, assuaged temporarily by sleep and the languor of the hot Sunday afternoon, dropped back into her mind. Her powerful body became rigid, beneath the flowing silk of her sophisticated dress. She was a tall woman, with the russet-blond hair, auburn in childhood, that is still found pure on the coasts of Moray Firth after a thousand years of Scandinavian occupation. Her face was thin and cold-coloured in repose. Her eyes, lacking spontaneity or self-forgetfulness, had the narrow, guarded look of one to whom the whole of life has been a struggle.

Miss Begg, hovering over Winifred, coffee-tray in hand, noticed the doctor's white face with concern. "I'm real sorry you had to have a visitor this afternoon, doctor. You coulda done with a nice, good rest."

Winifred smiled at her housekeeper. When she smiled, another personality, scintillating and tender, took charge of her features. "I wasn't aware I was tired. You look after me too well."

"I should hope so," said Miss Begg, dissatisfied. "But you never give yourself enough rest." She stooped, panting a little, for the coffee-cup, and straddled off along the veranda. Winifred controlled a faint shudder of repudiation. The smell of Miss Begg's damp and heavy body hung on the warm air.

Winifred lay back in the hammock, and her thoughts swirled forward to surround Dr. Treherne's visit. Winifred had always been clever with friends, and cultivated people whose hands were on the social ropes. And she had earned her reward. The consulting-room in Harley Street; her white and buff-coloured home among the elms and beeches of Hamp-

stead; and this green and blue striped hammock overlooking the steep and rethed garden.

The hammock was a concession to the doctor's overcrowded time-table. It swung from an iron frame, cemented into the floor of the veranda that stretched across the south side of the house. Relaxed among the cushions, Winifred could lie back and forget for a time the minds and bodies, mostly sick, always neurotic, that pressed in on every side; demanding time and sympathy; denying to the strong the right of all human beings to a life of their own. From the hammock she could see the handkerchief of lawn, sun-spotted, the narrow borders glowing with zinnia and antirrhinum, the high east wall, starred with clematis and white polygonum, and the line of elm tops against the remote sky. London lay submerged beyond the elm trees, but she had to climb to the Heath to see it properly. This was her favourite walk, and often after a tiring day at the consulting-room she and Maisie would watch the line of the Surrey hills smudging into the night sky. She liked to live so close to London, but with the whole dirty, sprawling city buttoned up, so that she could almost put out a hand to push it away. The air on the Heath was cold. Through these same elms and beeches the wind was blowing before they put up the Grand Stand on Epsom or raised Paul's dome. Even the now-faded gentility of Well Walk pleased Winifred. Keats had listened to his nightingale within a stone's throw of the hammock where she lay.

The sum of all this should have been success. She had had the sense to specialise in psychotherapy when general practitioners were two a penny. She had, in fact, merely qualified as a doctor in order to pass to a higher level. No one could have foreseen that a new hierarchy of medicine was to be evolved by Act of Parliament and her security threatened by the Health Act. Medicine was to be humiliated, and unless she herself could be sure of a leading role in the new set-up, she would suffer a personal humiliation too. She might even have to take her orders from men and women many years her junior. Dewey, for instance, or her one-time clinical assistant, Elizabeth Frayle. •

A copy of the hateful White Paper lay open on her bureau in the white and Chinese green lounge that ran from front to back of her house. And if she had been a fanciful woman she could almost have imagined a purple rim flowing round the edge of the official publication. But she was not fanciful: and the Health Act presented itself to her as merely another obstacle on her difficult road. For since she and Dorothy were children together, she had always had to come the hard way. There was much she preferred not to remember. But once on the Regional Board, she would be able to look backward without regret. Her failure as a music student, Dorothy's marriage, Clifford's treachery, the jealousy of the men doctors, and the continuous strain of a psychiatric practice on her nerves—none of these would have it in their power to hurt her any more. . . .

And here was Dr. Treherne, voluble as she hurried through the house to join Winifred on the veranda. ". . . and I told him they ought to be ashamed of themselves," Dr. Treherne declared. The first words of the sentence were lost on the front door-mat, where her accumulated indignation at male incapacity had exploded on the first glimpse of Winifred's knocker. "Give me a chair, Winifred. I'm exhausted after dealing with such a fool."

Winifred looked at the older woman with tranquillity. "Miss Begg is bringing us tea in the garden. I'll ask her for it right away."

"Wait a minute." Dr. Treherne sat down with emphasis, and allowed Winifred to pad her with cushions. Her dispatch-case and handbag were propped against the cane arm-chair. "Within reach, please. I've seen my cousin at the Ministry. When I get my breath back, I'll give you some gossip about the Regional Board."

She sat, breathing heavily, her brown, broad face alight with a pleasure that included the enamelled and formal brilliance of the steep garden, and the charming curve of Winifred's mouth, now relaxed and friendly like a child's.

"That green suits you," she said abruptly. "Lime and navy. Very dazzling. Never could wear green myself." She patted

her dispatch-case and looked at her younger colleague shrewdly from under her untidy brows. "Thank goodness I never suffered from the compulsion to go into black when I turned seventy. It's a putrid example to the patients." She took her hat off, and smoothed the dark wings of hair brushed from the centre parting.

Winifred said softly: "You always look delightful in red. The very first time I came to your house—but you wouldn't remember—you were wearing a fashionable red dress, all frog-braiding and gathers. 'Crushed strawberry' they called it in those days. It was a rich dress and you were a very famous person. I was terribly in awe of you."

Dr. Treherne chuckled. "I remember the dress. Much too fussy for my liking." She went on apologetically. "I had some very discouraged patients at that time. Real spinsters, my dear. The kind that died off while you were still in pigtails. Should have had husbands, of course, and a full quiver."

"And you told them?" prompted Winifred, her eyes beginning to dance.

Dr. Treherne grinned. "Had to show them that even maiden aunts could get some fun out of life." She pointed an accusing finger at Winifred. "Now don't try to get a rise out of me."

"But you were very impressive——"

"No. They were very shocked at me. However——" Dr. Treherne straightened her back and opened her brilliant eyes full on Winifred. "They got a kick out of me all the same."

"Like so many others," murmured Winifred, and turned away, staring into the sun-soaked garden. A Red Admiral butterfly swooped through the rose-arch at the bottom of the grass-plot and came to rest on a pile of hedge-cuttings at the back of the pergola. The east wall glistened with amethyst and snow. The air above the garden shook with heat. From within the house a cuckoo clock sounded the half-hour and there was a faint clinking of china as Miss Begg prepared tea.

"Bother that Dewey!" said Dr. Treherne abruptly. "I could say something stronger——"

Winifred withdrew her gaze from the stiff and sparkling

antirrhinums, now smouldering purple in the slanting rays of the afternoon sun. No hint of the leaping fear that for ever menaced her brittle façade of serenity was allowed to disturb the monotony of her pleasant voice. But the whiteness of the knuckles clutching the frame of the hammock showed Dr. Treherne that Winifred was perturbed.

"You think he's in the running for the appointment?"

"He's a sound doctor," said Dr. Treherne reluctantly. Loyalty to a colleague who had served her hospital steadily for as long as Winifred made her admit: "Outstanding in his way. And a worker. But it's his new book I'm worrying about."

"Yes, I've heard about that. But he's written several before."

"H'm. And articles in the journals." Dr. Treherne frowned. "His paper on the *Basic Hostility* was the starting-point for a whole controversy on transference."

"Then why are you worried?"

"He's been so interested in philosophy and the social implications of psychology lately. That brings him before the public. His *Man and Twentieth Century Morality* is in all the libraries. My cousin mentioned it to-day."

"I know." Winifred tried to keep the tiredness from her voice. If Dr. Treherne wanted to discuss Dewey's book, she must arouse herself and provide some intellectual conversation. But how, in Heaven's name, could she be expected to read every new book that came out with the spring and autumn lists? It was enough that one wall of her consulting-room should be lined with text-books. The harder problems of philosophy were beyond her, and indeed would be of no practical use in dealing with patients. As for politics, a psychiatrist was better without them: would be well advised at least not to publicise his opinions and prejudices.

"Has Dewey actually been nominated for a seat on the Board?"

"That's what I can't find out," admitted Dr. Treherne, her fingers beginning to tap on the chair. "But I had it from my cousin in the Ministry that the doctors want him. He gets on very well with the L.C.C. You remember the experiment he

made in Group Guidance? Peckham Health Centre on a small scale, no doubt. But it got him known."

"Then perhaps he's the right one for the job?" suggested Winifred levelly.

"I don't think so." Dr. Treherne spoke with complete sincerity. "There will be so much reorganisation. It will need a woman to remind them from time to time that we're dealing with human beings. Men never seem to remember that. We come back in psychiatry again and again to the mother. There *must* be a woman on the Board. Come, Winifred, you know that as well as I do."

Winifred withdrew her gaze from the older woman's brown, worried face. The white polygonum, pruned so often during the heat of this exceptional summer, was again foaming over the top of the wall. The pricking clematis gleamed black as a bird's wing against the sun. 'I must have it pruned again,' thought Winifred, and said aloud: "If I get this appointment, I shall take a long holiday first."

"Yes, will you? Yes, that might be wise," Dr. Treherne agreed.

"More than wise. Necessary." A smile twisted the corner of Winifred's mouth, leaving the eyes narrowed and watchful, the angle of the cheek-bone sharp. For years now she had consistently overcrowded her time-table, filling the days fuller and fuller with consultations, never refusing a new patient. Her clinics at the hospital went on and on. Night after night during the war she had battled with her car through the black-out, visiting well-to-do patients in their homes, or sitting on one of her innumerable committees. Sometimes she was so tired at the end of the day that if anyone so much as asked her to pick up a pin she felt she would scream. There came a time when you could no longer bear the demands for affection and the inconsiderateness of neurotics.

"The patients are getting too much for me," she confessed, a little surprised at her own admission. "I must get away from them for a time."

Dr. Treherne looked at her more closely. An overworked doctor was to her as much a casualty of the war as an over-

strained soldier, and her heart went out to both. Fatigue etches querulous lines on a face or turns it to stone. She had not that white and unrelenting expression often enough in the consulting-room.

"Sometimes I think you give too much, Winifred. It's not affection they need, but imperturbability."

"Oh, I know that." Winifred felt it hopeless to explain. She had never seen Dr. Treherne shaken after her contacts with patients. Sitting there in the sunlight, Dr. Treherne was all of a piece with the white and fawn-coloured house, and the deep-rooted limes and beeches, whose indifference to the heady generations that owned them was Winifred's main reason—though she did not know this—for buying this particular house.

"Have you some difficult cases just now?"

"They're all rather sick," Winifred told her coolly, for she already regretted having said so much. "I've never had a finer show of roses," she went on, nodding at the pergola, "than this year. Those yellow ramblers with the orange hearts have been quite perfect."

"Would you care, my dear," murmured Dr. Treherne, ignoring the roses, "to talk about them?"

With a faint shrug, Winifred said: "My biggest headache is still the Lawrence woman." Her words, and the regret behind them, evoked a dynamic presence at the quiet discussion: an elegant little creature, very white, with restless, protuberant eyes, a Roman profile, and the air of an amiable but inquisitive hawk.

"I remember," assented Dr. Treherne, pleased that her memory, so unreliable nowadays, had not failed Winifred. "I saw her once when you were on holiday, didn't I? Dear me, yes. She talked about you the whole time, and——"

"No doubt she did," interrupted Winifred, frowning a little. She had not expected the old lady to recall Maisie so readily. "Well, Maisie Lawrence is just one of them. These climacteric breakdowns are very hard to handle." She got up abruptly and pressed a bell on the frame of the french window. "For tea," she explained, and smiled suddenly. "Oh, and I've got the usual batch of middle-aged housewives whose husbands are bored with them. Sometimes I wish I could show them

some really tragic cases." She sat down, clasping her hands behind her head, and closed her eyes, letting the warmth caress her eyeballs through the lids. Was there not some school of oculists who prescribed sunbathing for aching eyes and head? "I've got a hysteric too, name of Bentley," she went on dreamily. "Tremor of the hands. Might develop into functional paralysis. Thinks she should have been a famous pianist."

Dr. Treherne inclined her head nearer to Winifred. She found it hard these days to pick up people's voices, but hoped that her deafness had not yet become too tiresome. "Pianist, did you say? Is she good?"

"I shouldn't think so," said Winifred more loudly. "Miss Bentley talks a lot." She laughed shortly. "I always find hysterics particularly hard going. I haven't much patience with them."

Troubled, Dr. Treherne bent her head and studied the lines on her broad, generous hands. "Yet they're often quite gifted people. But, of course, to a doctor . . . so unpractical——" Her words died away on a note of question.

Winifred said flatly: "They're usually quite worthless to society. And when there are so many other more worth-while cases——"

A smile of relief creased Dr. Treherne's brown face. "It's the children you really love," she broke in warmly. "My dear, I know how you feel. And you were so dreadfully over-worked in the war——"

"I suppose so," agreed Winifred. Resenting the older woman's interest, she felt a little ashamed of herself for her resentment. She opened her handbag and took out a snapshot. "Do you remember that little creature?"

Dr. Treherne dived into the capacious bag at her feet and brought out her spectacles. They fell forward on her nose as she held up the snapshot of a little girl—a fair-haired child, with widely-spaced eyes set in a face of delicate bony structure, and an attractive air of humour and intelligence. "No. . . . Yes, wait a minute——" Rescuing the spectacles from imminent danger of smash, she threw up her head and said incredulously

lously: "Not that poor little pupil of Miss Lawrence's surely?" Winifred nodded. "My dear Winifred, you're a marvel."

The colour crept into Winifred's cheeks as she disclaimed: "Just a routine job. Still, she has improved, hasn't she?"

"I should think she *has* improved! Why, when you first had her she was quite ugly. And defiant, and a bully. But *this* child looks charming."

Winifred said quietly: "Severe and chronic anxiety. I had to treat the mother, and the mother has to be seen to be believed." She sighed and turned from Dr. Treherne's admiring stare. "Angela Mainwaring takes her looks and intelligence from her father. It's a broken family. The old story——"

Within the house they could hear the heavy steps of Miss Begg. A door opened and china rattled as the tea-wagon made its way across woolly mats and shiny parquet. "People," said Winifred remotely, "never realise when they're well off. With a child like Angela—— But the mother does nothing but whine. Like all the rest of them. . . . If I go away——"

She broke off, realising quite definitely now that she *must* go away. There was this nightmare of a life in London—patients, money; patients, success. But always patients. In Australia—it was in all Antony's letters—you could bathe at midnight and lie all day in the sun, watching the Pacific dazzle its surf on to the emerald-fringed beaches. A little bubble of indignation, long submerged, surfaced and broke into fragments. Antony had invited her so often to visit them before it was too late, and always her reply was dutifully the same: "I'd love to, but I couldn't leave the patients." What a fool she was. A beloved brother was worth a thousand patients.

They were silent while Miss Begg rolled out the tea-wagon, set with the wild strawberry china given to Winifred by Dr. Treherne when she first bought the house. There were a plate of pancakes hot from the griddle, sandwiches made with freshly boiled eggs—the gift of a patient—heather honey, and rhubarb jam. On the floor of the wagon Miss Begg had arranged sweet biscuits in parallel rows and several kinds of home-made cake. From within the house a cuckoo clock announced the hour of four.

"We enjoyed those holidays in Switzerland——" said Dr. Treherne, with apparent irrelevance.

Winifred moved to a higher chair by the wagon, and lifted the silver teapot carefully from its stand. Thus had she poured out tea for Dr. Treherne on the Sunday afternoons of more than twenty years. She had a sudden frightening impulse to smash the delicate strawberry-patterned china, to fling the teapot anywhere into the static, teeming garden, to overturn something: so that it need not be the fag-end of yet another Sunday, drained so slowly of light as the hours dwindled towards bedtime. But she added milk and sugar with a steady hand.

"Your tea is as you like it, I think." She smiled at Dr. Treherne with her usual warm solicitude.

"Touching that holiday——" began Dr. Treherne, her teacup raised.

Winifred shook her head. "It would take a lot of arranging. . . . Try one of the pancakes while they're hot."

But already in imagination she had begun to arrange it. She would get away from them all by a journey that would take thousands of miles and hundreds of hours. There would be no claims on her psychiatry in Australia.

II

"DEWEY WILL have to take them for you," said Dr. Treherne decisively. "Some of them anyway."

"Take them?" asked Winifred.

"The patients, I mean."

"Oh, the patients. Yes. Well, I was thinking of a locum. But it's not going to be easy——"

Dr. Treherne, leaning forward for a sandwich, tapped Winifred sharply on the knee. "Now listen, Winifred. You know very well what we diagnose when a patient says he can't be spared. And makes out he's indispensable. The point is

this——” She paused, noticing the angle at which the sunlight caught Winifred’s profile from behind and sharpened the oblongs of shadow in cheeks and eye-sockets; the eyebrows were unplucked and grew here and there down over the lids, and the irises which had once been blue were now almost colourless. Only the lipstick, following in a slapdash kind of way the thin line of the upper lip, flared a tired and angry defiance. Unconsciously falling into the tone with which she usually addressed patients, Dr. Treherne went on: “You look thinner in the face and not at all well. But what can anyone expect after the way psychiatrists were overworked during the war?” Her brown, broad face relaxed as she added cheerfully: “But you’ll be able to tackle anything after a proper change.”

“I hope so.” Winifred let some of the weariness she felt appear in her voice. “But I’m not as young as I was. . . . I’ve been at it now for nearly fifteen years—and years of training before that. At my time of life——”

“Stuff and nonsense!” exclaimed Dr. Treherne. “You’ve got many years of work ahead yet.”

“I started too late.”

“What does that matter now? It’s all in the past.” Dr. Treherne lifted her plump arms as if to embrace the small, sunlit house and garden, where an expensive artlessness had created between the high, flower-covered walls an illusion of distance. “You’ve arrived, Winifred. Oh yes, I know you had a few setbacks at the beginning. But taking it all in all, you’ve gone through the course like a knife through butter. Show me any man who could have done as well.”

“At thirty,” murmured Winifred. “To go back to school at the age of thirty—when most doctors have been in practice for several years already. Only *you* could have made me do it.”

“There you are, then.” Having aroused pride in the result, Dr. Treherne was prepared to concede the magnitude of the undertaking. “But you weren’t as new to medicine as all that, Winifred. You’d been carrying the social investigations at Walthamstow for years.”

“I liked it better than nursing.”

“Of course you did. That’s why I knew you’d make such

a grand psychiatrist." Dr. Treherne shook her head. "You were born for the job, but it took me to see it—and make you see it. You gave me a lot of trouble at first. And now—"

Winifred shivered.

It had all happened away back in the early 'twenties, but Dr. Treherne had never wavered in her rather touching faith. Winifred remembered how she had felt on that afternoon of 1919, when she waited between the columns of Dr. Treherne's porch in Bedford Square, hating the silly shapelessness of her nurse's cloak, and gripping her testimonials tightly in one gloved hand. A butler opened the door, and she was shown, expecting magnificence, into an austere room piled high with office files and reference books. She rehearsed what she would say when the famous Dr. Treherne came in.

But the interview turned out to be quite simple. Dr. Treherne, at close quarters, seemed less formidable than the nurses at the hospital where Winifred worked had led her to suppose. She was not even particularly distinguished to look at, in spite of her reputation. Her face, broad like a peasant's, with its heavy nose and long, mobile lips, which vanished at the corners into deep, vertical wrinkles, could have been repulsive. But Dr. Treherne was not repulsive because, looking at her, you were held by the candour and exhilaration of the eyes. They were unshadowed eyes, that withheld no spontaneity of feeling, and often sparkled with the expectation of response. Under her dark wings of hair, brushed Quaker-fashion to the nape of her neck, she looked out on a world which roused her constantly to indignation, but which had never touched in her a mood of satiety or despair. She used no make-up to camouflage her fifty-six years of unremitting activity, but her dress, peacock-blue silk, with ornaments of old silver set with garnets, struck a pleasant note of mundanity. She listened without comment to Winifred's account of her education and antecedents. And it did not surprise her that any young woman should wish to devote her life to the mentally sick.

"And then I heard that you were opening a clinic for early nervous disorders," concluded Winifred. "And as I've had experience of mental nursing——" She paused hopefully.

"But all that's very interesting," broke in Dr. Treherne warmly. "As a matter of fact, I'm doing more than that. There will be beds for in-patients as well." She began to describe the Georgian house in Walthamstow which she had bought with her own capital, and which was to be the first of a chain of hospitals for the treatment of functional nervous cases.

Listening to the harsh, confident voice of the older woman, watching the brown-skinned, generous face with its big mouth and beaming eyes, Winifred guessed rightly that she would be picked for the job of social worker in this impressive new experiment. She would get away from the communal rooms at the hospital and the insolent gossip of the young nurses. She would finish with bedpans and scrubbing-brushes and with running errands at the caprice of the sister. She would have a room where people knocked before they entered. She would be the first of her family to pick for herself an important post in London. This would be something to tell her sister Dorothy, still fussing over the trivia of housekeeping at home and being polite to their father's parishioners. . . . Psychiatry—Dorothy would not know the meaning of the word. . . .

Winifred roused herself to follow Dr. Treherne's pleasant shuttling between enthusiasm and indignation. "Yes, it *is* appalling," she agreed, and wondered why this famous woman should be so bitter about the sufferings inflicted by men upon women.

Dr. Treherne smiled. "No, you can't altogether understand. The professions are open nowadays to women—even medicine." Remembering how she and her brother Edwin had schemed to become doctors, and how easy it had been made for Edwin, how thwarting for herself, she added: "Until we learn to be as tolerant to the basic instincts of women as we are to those of men, women will continue to provide the majority of our patients."

"But the war has changed all that," hazarded Winifred. "I don't think my generation suffers much from inhibition." She thought of certain objects imperfectly concealed in the nurses' lockers.

"Licence is a sign of immaturity," said Dr. Treherne mildly.

"But I like the women of your generation. However——" She shook hands with Winifred, and promised to write to her as soon as she had verified the references. . . .

It became clear to Winifred in the years that followed that the flattery and submission of other women were to be had for the asking. She liked to sit beside Dr. Treherne in the green and white study of the Walthamstow hospital, where afterwards the patients would enter one by one, and to let her eyes wander over the long, low bookshelves, the couch with its folded rug, the soporific arm-chairs by the fireplace, the velvet curtains glowing in the reflection of the gas fire. Over by the door was the filing cabinet where so many secrets were entered in Dr. Treherne's diamond-type handwriting, legible as a thumbnail Testament beneath a microscope. The drawers of the bureau were stacked with memoranda and cuttings, precisely folded and matched like the linen of a Victorian press. The big-boned, generous body of Dr. Treherne moved as delicately among her possessions as her mind among the turbulent, sullen mental processes of her psycho-neurotic patients. In return for insight she received gratitude; for support, submission.

Winifred liked to hear the pride and affection in the patients' voices: "Our doctor . . . The doctor . . . Our doctor . . . Dear doctor. . . ." The murmur swelled and gathered emphasis as the years went by. A long-backed, stooping woman, with claw-like hands and dull eyes, would shuffle listlessly into the study, and a few weeks later her step would be eager in the passage, and there would be patterns for a new outfit in her handbag. Or a short-necked woman of fifty, brought sobbing into the hospital after years of gross overwork, would wake in serenity and confidence after a fortnight of narcotic-induced sleep. "Dr. Treherne's just wonderful. . . . I make a bee-line for Walthamstow whenever I come back to London. I'd never really known before what happiness was like. . . ."

Collecting data on Dr. Treherne's cases in her sloping handwriting, making appointments for out-patients, preparing reports on patients for general practitioners, or interviewing puzzled relatives, Winifred was borne along by the routine of

the hospital. Some of the deference paid to Dr. Treherne was deflected to her deputy. The houses in east and south-east London lost a fourth wall, and Winifred was fascinated by what went on unsuspected in the sombre interiors.

But it was not until her engagement to Clifford Forrester was finally broken off that Dr. Treherne persuaded her to consider a medical career for herself. "He was no good to you, Winifred." They were on Christian name terms by now. "He was not sufficiently mature. Sooner or later he would have reacted in his own way against the responsibility of marriage."

Winifred flushed. "There was nothing to suggest at the time that he was not in love with me."

They were staying the week-end at Dr. Treherne's house in Surrey. From the library window the garden sloped away to the west, and the known outlines of distant hills were washed in blurrily, as if a painter had trailed his dripping brush through the horizon. Dr. Treherne was pouring out tea by the library window. There was a cloth of fine French lace, but the tea-service was modern, with a steel teapot and square blue plates.

She looked across to Winifred. "He sensed your capacity, my dear. Do you think I haven't noticed—all this time—how you give to the patients that something they look for—and need—in a doctor?"

"You mean——?" stammered Winifred.

"Of course I do." Dr. Treherne let a note of urgency underline her words. "Have you never thought you would like to qualify as a psychiatrist yourself?"

"But I couldn't do it." Winifred was a little aghast. Surely her friend would realise the impossibility at the age of twenty-nine of going back to school and beginning the long course of study necessary for a medical career? Besides, she had never been brilliant. She only scraped through her matriculation at the second attempt. And . . . Oh, there were a hundred other difficulties. . . . Money. . . . Where would she live while she was studying? . . . And again, to begin at nearly thirty! She might never get through the exams. . . . The idea was fantastic.

Dr. Treherne looked unimpressed. "Now don't fly off the handle, Winifred. I'll take care of the fees, and when you're

through, I'll take you into partnership." She leaned forward earnestly. "I mean this, Winifred. You have the making of a wonderful doctor, and I know you have the physique to stay the course. And I do so want to hand over my work to a woman who really cares."

But it was more than a year before Winifred dared to consent. It amused her in after-life to tell patients how she had to be kicked into medicine. But the truth was that she was deadly afraid of the endless examinations that lay between her and success. And her fear was justified, because her failures seemed endless too. There were the physics paper in the first examination; anatomy in the second; the clinical examination in surgery and the oral examination in forensic medicine in the third. And always the knowledge of inadequacy. The younger and brilliant members of her group passed beyond her and qualified, and the years slipped by. But Dr. Treherne continued to believe in her through those difficult years, keeping alive the flame of ambition, and holding out the promise of an immediate partnership once she was through. Winifred knew there would be no questioning of her power and importance when she could write the coveted letters after her name. A registrable medical degree—this would be something with which to confront Clifford's suburban home (for he was now married to Kathleen) and Dorothy's undistinguished children.

She got it at last. Dr. Treherne set her up in general practice; and the money—so hard to come by when it was doled out in weekly pay packets—began to swell to noble proportions. The cashier at the bank singled her out for his cheery comments on the headlines from Europe or the score at Wimbledon. But she, enjoying all this, never forgot for a moment that security still lay in the future. She enrolled for the course in psychological medicine, and three years later was able to add D.P.M. to the row of letters after her name. After an interval, decent but not too long, she rented a room in Harley Street, and put her own brass plate on its distinguished door. She was forty-three years of age, and had overworked steadily for the past thirteen years.

She was the creation of Dr. Treherne, and, as the older

woman retired gradually from active work. Dr. Treherne's patients were passed without difficulty to the younger partner. But Winifred inherited more than the patients. Dr. Treherne was a famous pioneer, rich, and reputed to be a 'character'. She had the founding of a hospital to her credit, and was known to the non-medical public by her books and, anonymously, by her broadcasts. Winifred took over the glamour and wore it almost with distinction. The patients were well-to-do, and she began to wear her income too as if she had never known poverty. With good clothes and a smart house, she learnt to get by. . . .

Dr. Treherne beamed her approval. Sitting in Winifred's garden, this golden afternoon of early autumn, she looked back over the years, and marvelled that her own early conflicts, once so poignant, now seemed too dim even to remember. Her father was dead. And Edwin, the younger brother, whose talents had blinded all the family to her own fanatical ambitions, was dead too. And all the other men who had stood, with their senseless prejudices, between her and the attainment of her ideal—dead or obliterated. But Winifred remained: a living proof of her conviction that healing is the unique endowment of women. Women care for life, while men—all historical evidence showed this—destroy it.

"I shall use whatever influence I may possess to get you on the Regional Board, Winifred."

Her eyes ranged placidly over the familiar scene. The sun had shifted from the veranda, and a bar of light lay across the syringa bushes beyond the arch of the pergola. The roses hung in dusky bunches, heavy as grapes. On the east wall the glazed petals of polygonum were a white fire in the unshadowed sunlight. Tender stems of clematis thrust needle-sharp and amethyst-black petals upward into the still air. The heat—it was late September—was no longer unbearable. By contrast, the objects in Winifred's lounge behind the open french window were becoming clearer. She could see the blonde damask of the swollen arm-chairs, and sprays of honesty gleaming in a pale jar on the cocktail cabinet. Copies of *Punch* and the latest *Vogue* sprawled across the coffee-table.

Winifred was sitting up very straight and smiling at her benefactor with bright, quizzical eyes. She had forgotten the empty hours that filled her Sunday evenings with an unnameable apprehension, and that had to be passed through before Monday morning found her once again in the consulting-room in Harley Street. The week would begin with Joyce Wicklow coming to take down her letters. And then there would be nothing but patients till bed-time. On Monday mornings Mrs. Martin, Miss Bentley, Lady Hollerton. On Monday afternoons the hospital. On Monday evenings, Maisie . . . The treadmill of professional engagements.

She smiled at the beaming Dr. Treherne. Patients who knew this mood of hers reacted with fear or adoration according to their experience. But Dr. Treherne drew her experience of Winifred from half a lifetime of intimacy, and was not disquieted.

III

"THAT'LL DO for now," said Winifred to her secretary next morning, "and tell Mrs. Martin I'm ready for her as you go out."

Winifred gathered up the morning's correspondence and stuffed it into one of the shallow drawers of her bureau. Notes and memoranda lay face-upwards on the flap where she had thrown them. The small drawers to left and right of the pigeon-holes were already full. Only the petty cash drawer, into which she slipped the Treasury notes and odd silver which patients paid her on the spot, was half empty. Alone among her drawers she kept this one tidy. There were some sheets of postage stamps in it, blue and orange, and some silver which she needed for change, and the Treasury notes which she cleared from it night and morning.

Joyce Wicklow pulled her slack felt hat farther down over

her face and crossed the consulting-room. Her coat lay with Winifred's on the sofa by the door, and as she bent to get it her skirt parted company with her red jumper, revealing a line of soiled slip. Curbing her irritation, because part-time secretaries were scarce, Winifred added: "I must have them ready for signing by lunch-time to-morrow."

"That's the half-hour striking," answered Joyce, shrugging one shoulder in the direction of the hall. Winifred, who had ignored the chiming of the grandfather clock which warned her she was half an hour behind schedule, frowned. "Don't forget," she said repressively, "to ring my sister at her club and tell her I'll pick her up in time for lunch."

Left to herself, Winifred took a quick glance round the consulting-room, which always on Monday mornings gave her a peculiar welcome. It was a high-ceilinged room, with awkward windows on the street side, needing many yards of curtains to absorb the radiation of the cold plate glass in winter. The interior was cold. Grey carpet. Roll-top bureau. White marble mantelpiece. Oil paintings of Victorian faces on the walls—small, lighted circles of majesty surrounded by profound shadow and six-inch rectangles of solid gilt. Furniture of olive and grey, withheld from the September sunlight that threw its net over the shopping crowds in Oxford Street to the south or the grey dignity of Marylebone Road to the north, struck a severely professional note. It was fitting, Winifred thought, that here in Harley Street there should be no vistas into the contemporary world. Death was the principal preoccupation, and the tall terraces, with their weighty and funereal front doors, and their blank window-panes underlined with the black lace of improbable balconies, were a silent comment on the foolishness and confusion of human aspirations.

She rented the room furnished and had left it impersonal, but two of the pictures were her own. Above the mantelpiece she had hung a glassy beach in water-colour, pleasantly sprinkled with indigo and enquiring gulls. And opposite the couch where patients did their free associations she had placed a group of Botticelli red-heads—Madonna, Babe and prayerful adorers. But the room had one big splash of autumn colour. On the

top of the bureau stood a vase of bronze, hot-house chrysanthemums, and when Joyce had gone she explored with her fingers among the stems, and shook them to show the beauty of the great tawny blooms. She was enjoying the coolness of the petals against her palms when the door opened and Jean Martin came shyly into the consulting-room.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Martin," said Winifred cordially.

The young woman who hesitated by the door was about thirty-five. She was tall, narrow-chested, and badly dressed in various shades of brown. Her stoop, and her brief, sideways smile at Winifred, gave her a discouraged air. She fumbled with the buttons of her mackintosh, and when she took off her beret, bleached bands of hair, dark at the roots, stuck out stiffly from her neck, as if scissored by a home hair-cut. She had a permanent frown between the eyes, and her hands, covered by tiny wrinkles between the fan-spokes of clear veins, made incessant movements of plucking at her dress and head. She lay down on the couch between the fireside wall and the door.

"Did you write out your dreams for me this time?" asked Winifred softly.

"A few." Breathless, in spite of her long wait in the room downstairs, Jean opened her handbag and held out some sheets of notepaper to Winifred. Then she drew the grey rug up to her chin and lay stiffly, flat on her back, facing the Madonna. Her feet, which felt icy, dangled foolishly over the end of the couch, which was too short for her, and her legs—she tried hard to control this—began to tremble.

Winifred pulled a low stool to within a few feet of Jean, and switched on her professional voice: controlled, toneless, infinitely wise. "And how have you been sleeping?"

"I haven't been sleeping too well, doctor." Jean looked wistfully at the hand-written sheets which Winifred was holding. "I wanted to tell you about that. Since I saw you last I've averaged about two hours a night. Sometimes I've not dropped off till five." The smudges under her eyes confirmed this. "You can't do a day's work on two hours' sleep."

"I'll give you some tablets for that." Winifred strewed a

reminder to herself on the empty half sheet at the back of the dreams. "You seem to be dreaming a good deal," she commented doubtfully, and wondered how long it would take to get through this lot. She bent her head and began to read.

Left to her own thoughts, Jean's eyes wandered round the consulting-room. There was no point of comfort in its cool impersonality, and of Winifred she could see only the firm white hands and a crest of curls. But on the bureau the great sheaf of tawny chrysanthemums lifted their tattered and fiery pennons into the quiet air, and she stared at them gratefully while she waited for Winifred's comments on her dreams. The complete stillness, broken only by an occasional rustle, as Winifred turned a page or jotted down a note in the big, black book where she recorded interviews with patients, tantalised Jean by its deceptive illusion of intimacy. But intimacy just failed to be achieved, and Jean could only wonder at her own clumsiness that had somehow spoilt a relationship which had seemed to offer Paradise. . . . She wondered too what the diagnosis of her case could be, and would have liked to borrow the big, black book for just five minutes. For Winifred had not told her why she was ill, and indeed she did not feel ill—only exhausted at times by the overwork at home, and at times mildly depressed; though, to be sure, since her visit to Harley Street in the spring, the depression had grown vastly more unmanageable and might well now be classified as some form of neurotic illness. . . .

It was strange to find herself committed thus to an indefinite period of treatment. Until her husband, Carey Martin, practically forced her, against her will, to consult Dr. Winifred Orwin, Jean had always considered she got along pretty well, and that she was a sensible sort of creature who had neither time nor money to indulge in 'nerves'. It was true that hers was not a very happy marriage, but Jean had married for a home and was quite prepared to make Carey as good a wife in every way as she knew how. She had not foreseen that the body is a dictator in its own house, and capable of curious revenges when its compulsive demands are too long or too violently ignored.

The trouble had started with Dr. Dewey's letter. It arrived about a month after Carey's demobilisation from the Army and he threw it across the breakfast-table to Jean one morning with the remarks: "There you are, my dear. I've heard from that chap, Dewey. Top of the profession and a darned good chap into the bargain. If he says you're to see Dr. Winifred Orwin, then Dr. Winifred Orwin it is. I'll make an appointment for you to see her at once."

Jean put the cosy back over the coffee-pot before picking up the letter with some reluctance. She glanced at the contents, then put it down by her plate and addressed herself with energy to getting the elder boys off to school. They liked to dawdle over breakfast, and precious moments were wasted while school-books and bus fares were collected from odd corners of the house. The baby was beginning to whimper in its cot by the fireplace, throwing its head from side to side and sucking at the air.

"He'll have to wait another half-hour," said Jean distractedly. "Carey, about this doctor of yours——" She put up a hand to the back of her neck, and twisted the limp ends into a roll which immediately fell down again when her hand was removed. "Honestly, I don't see how I can spare the time to go to a doctor just now."

His good-natured face took on a peevish expression. She was conscious of his whole body braced in obstinacy against her. She could not see him very well, because he was sitting with his back against the window, but she knew the features by heart. A broad, high forehead, and hair with a spring in it: eyes that bulged and flickered a little, very bright, not calm or resigned; a big, blunt nose; and a long, mobile, smiling mouth. From the mouth upwards it was an impressive, volatile face, flashing with energy, ingratiating, kind. But below the mouth all was weakness and retirement. The chin, with a cleft in it, receded like a disappointed baby's.

But if she could not see him, she could hear him, and she knew from his hectoring tone that they were in for one of their unending arguments unless she agreed with him quickly. This particular argument was a familiar one, dating from long

before the war and repeated with sickening monotony whenever Carey came home on leave. Dr. Dewey's letter looked like forcing a crisis.

To forestall Carey's objections Jean picked up the letter again and read it through. It was brief and she began to speculate, not unpleasantly, on the character of the man who had written it. She liked the unmedical handwriting, without kicks or flourishes, and the steady signature which suggested a refreshing freedom from conceit. There was nothing in this letter to which she could take exception.

'DEAR MAJOR MARTIN,

'I was surprised that you were already demobbed, for when I last saw you you were not too hopeful. I expect you are enjoying this first long leave with your family. Service life is all very well, but it's good to get back home and to one's own job in Civvy Street. I am still at the hospital as you will see from the address at the head of this letter, but I hope to follow your good example soon.

'Now about the query in your letter. I think you are wise to send your wife to a psychiatrist, as there may be some little matter making the adjustment between you difficult, and which could be set right in a few helpful talks. I suggest you get into touch with Dr. Winifred Orwin of Harley Street—I knew her fairly well before the war, when we were both on the honorary staff of the Walthamstow Hospital. She has had a good deal of experience among women and children. If you would like to mention my name when you write, please do so.

'With best wishes to you both, I remain,

'Yours sincerely,

'FRANK DEWEY.'

"Who exactly is this man Dewey?" asked Jean, passing back the letter.

Carey pushed his plate away and felt round in his pockets for tobacco pouch and pipe. "Wait a minute." He stuffed the bowl firmly, struck a match, and got the pipe well drawing

before leaning forward with both elbows on the table to watch his wife. Her hands, piling the breakfast dishes on to the tray, moved too quickly and made a small, incessant clinking of china. In spite of her flushed cheeks and bright eyes she looked bedraggled and unwell. The zipper of her shapeless jersey was only half drawn.

"You remember the Rehabilitation Hospital I was sent to after Alamein?"

"Quite well." She glanced momentarily at Carey, then crossed to the baby's cot. It was starting to screw up its eyes and show its gums in a loud demand for food. She turned it on its side and tucked in the blankets expertly. "Was that where you met him?"

Carey blew out a cloud of smoke. "He was the top-rank psychiatrist there. Four others worked under him, but Dewey was the one the fellows liked best. He and I got quite pally, and we had some darned interesting talks." He put the pipe back in his mouth, and went on indistinctly, biting the stem: "I wouldn't be a psychiatrist if they paid me the American loan."

Jean smiled uncertainly. "Did you talk about me when you were there?" She gathered up the knives and forks, and laid them in a neat heap by the dirty dishes.

"You bet I did," said Carey, banging the table suddenly with his fist. The noise startled the baby, who opened its mouth and howled indignantly. A spasm of anger twisted Carey's good-natured features, which took on an unexpected air of malignancy. "Damn that kid," he said aggressively, averting his eyes from the cot. "Can't you manage to keep it quiet once in a while so that we can have a short talk? I want you *sometimes* to myself, you know."

"I can't help it," Jean fretted. "It's nearly his feeding-time. Come and talk to me in the kitchen while I prepare his bottle." She swept the remainder of the breakfast things on to the tray and hurried down the passage. Carey sat still. After a minute she called out: "Aren't you coming? I'd like to hear the rest of it."

Carey swallowed his resentment and followed her.

"All right, all right. But these interruptions put me off my stride." Where was I? Oh yes, Dewey." Leaning against the kitchen wall he went on, still with an edge to his voice: "I believe he's quite a well-known man outside the profession. He's the author of several books. In fact, he's doing one now, I believe. That's why I decided to write to him about us, Jean." He took the pipe out of his mouth and stared at her. "We can't go on much longer like this, you know. We're heading for a bust-up. And you'll be responsible."

Jean, stirring the saucepan unhappily, murmured: "I'm trying to please everyone at once. I can't do more than I'm doing."

"Now listen, Jean." Carey spoke with great deliberation. "You've been an unsatisfactory wife to me for a good many years now. You run my house and you're a good nursemaid to the children. But a man—any man—wants a lot more than that. If you can't give it, then there's something wrong with you. If there's something wrong with you, you need to see a doctor. And what's more, you'd better see one at once." He took Dr. Dewey's letter from his pocket and read out the suggested name. "Dr. Winifred Orwin of Harley Street. That's the one he recommends. I shall write to Dr. Orwin at once and ask her to give you an appointment. . . ." And he wrote that evening. . . .

Winifred's reply was delayed for a few days, but this did not surprise Jean or Carey. To them the great ones of the earth, including those of Harley Street, were engaged in incessant, mysterious activities, which South Croydon could not hope to understand. The power of her position, which Winifred so well understood, set her apart in their eyes from the business community which gave appointments by return of post. They knew nothing of Joyce Wicklow's bi-weekly visits, or how the necessity of coping with reports and bills made a salad of Winifred's day-to-day correspondence.

So, a fortnight later, dressed in her best brown coat and skirt and jersey to match, Jean wheeled the pram to a neighbour's house and left the three small boys there, while she travelled in a series of buses to Oxford Circus, and trotted

anxiously up Oxford Street to Evans's, and looked for the entrance to Harley Street and for Winifred's brass plate. She arrived all of a lather, with ten minutes to spare, and was hustled by a white-overalled, elderly woman into the waiting-room at the end of the hall. Ten minutes more, she reflected, and she would have been late. She could only be thankful that she had got up as early as six to do the nappies. She pulled off her gloves to examine her finger-nails, and wished she had had time to rub some cream into the roughened skin of her hands. The waiting-room intimidated her. Its height, its walls with their wide panels of palely-gleaming paint, the rich glow of the mahogany table and the subdued glow of the Turkey red carpet, spoke of a comfort and security which made the bungalow seem by contrast brittle and gimcrack. She was ashamed of her oak and walnut furniture, chosen so lovingly and paid for on the H.P. It seemed terrible to come to a place like this and talk about the doings of herself and Carey in the cheap, four-foot double bed. She was comforted a little, however, when she noticed the fireplace, whose old-fashioned iron bars and surrounding marble could not give out the cosy heat of their open fires at home. Though even that, she thought, would hardly matter in a place like this where money could be no object. She hoped devoutly that she would not have to come here too often, for money was very much an object of concern in Croydon. Carey was quite reckless, she thought, and ready, for a few minutes' pleasure, to plunge them all into expenses which he admitted himself were quite indefinite. She looked up at the clock—a gilt circle, housed in a black, Doric temple—and saw that it was already ten o'clock. Dr. Orwin would send for her any moment. Well, she had got her breath back now, and the sooner she was through with this little set-to the better.

But, as it happened, there were still forty minutes to wait. She had plenty of time to get worked up all over again, and she did in fact feel more and more nervous as the lacy gilt hands of the clock moved slowly on. She did not know whether to be glad or sorry when the handle of the waiting-room turned, and there was Winifred smiling at her with an intimate and

tender smile that warmed her eyes and barely curved her lips. "As if," Jean told Carey afterwards, "there was no one in the world she wanted to see more than me." "A useful trick," commented Carey. "No one would be fool enough to spill their troubles over a doctor who looked fed-up or bored."

Lying down on the couch in order to do free association was also a comfortable trick—at first. Wearied by the incessant work of her house and the care of three young children, Jean grew to love the moment when she could relax on the couch and feel for a short time that her own petty problems were to be taken seriously by someone who could understand. She began to talk freely about her life with the children and about her own childhood. Gradually she built up for Winifred a picture that explained her present predicament of gross overwork and constant anxiety lest anything should go wrong. And the reasons for the unhappiness of her marriage with Carey became crystal-clear to Winifred very early in the sessions. During the following months they became increasingly clear to Jean also. . . .

"All these dreams about your life at home are very characteristic," remarked Winifred, and looked up from her reading with a smile. "The ones about the housework, I mean."

"And the party I planned for the children?"

"I'll read them back to you." Winifred shuffled the pages and began to read aloud to Jean in her clear, unemotional voice:

"I planned a birthday party for Johnnie. I made a lot of cakes and sweets, and I queued at a toyshop for crackers and balloons. But a woman in a brown mackintosh stood in front of me and bought up most of the stock. When I got home the cakes had dwindled to nothing and the furniture was all moved into the wrong places and the beds were unmade. I hung candles on the Christmas tree, but when the children arrived the candles had gone out. I laid my head down on my arms and began to cry, because I could not bring order into the house.'

"Still striving after perfection, aren't you?" said Winifred indulgently.

"No, not really." Jean missed the weariness in Winifred's eyes, bent consciously downwards, but the contrast between the doctor's smooth hands and her own grubby nails and chapped knuckles made her cover her own hands with the fringe of the grey rug. "But there's such a lot to do. I must keep the house clean or it wouldn't be healthy." She started on the complaint, familiar to Winifred, of the overburdened housewife. Chores. . . . The shortages. . . . The children. . . . The seven-day week. . . . "It wouldn't be so bad if our bungalow were near the shops. But I have to push Hugh's pram down the long hill to Croydon, and he doesn't finish his bath and feed till eleven. There's no morning left." As she spoke, the steam of a diminutive kitchenette rose before Winifred's imagination—a pail of soaking nappies, a clothes-horse airing before the fire, children's torn picture books and broken pencils. . . . "I suppose that's what the dream's about?"

"Yes. You worry far too much about your family, and take it all too much to heart. The dreams make it quite clear. Except this." Winifred looked up enquiringly. "Who is the woman in the brown mackintosh?"

Jean shook her head. "I don't know anyone who wears a brown mackintosh. Except—but it couldn't be myself, could it?"

"I don't see why not." Winifred considered the dream again. "Yes. I think it *is* you. You see, you're always so anxious to go one better than you can—or need. And in this case the woman in the brown mackintosh got all the cakes. She's the part of you that wants to attain perfection."

Jean smiled faintly. "No part of me gets it in real life." She went on shyly: "But I'm always working."

There was a stock answer to that one—"Don't"—and Winifred made it. "After all, if you take the trouble to compare yourself with other mothers up and down the country, you will find plenty more competent than yourself. And plenty less. To be comfortably in the middle—that is all anyone can wish for."

"Oh no," protested Jean, shocked. "I'd hate to compare myself with the worst."

"Why?" asked Winifred coolly.

"But the things you read about in the papers! Children shut up for hours in empty rooms . . . and dirty. And being burnt with hot pokers. And beaten, and injured. . . ."

"That is one end of the scale. You wouldn't do those things, of course." Winifred hesitated. "Listen. When I was a medical student, I sometimes felt very discouraged when I measured myself against the most brilliant members of my group. But when I looked at the others—why, some of them were perfect fools. And I knew I was all right. I was somewhere in the middle."

Jean was silent. If Dr. Orwin could not see why patients would wish their doctor to be clever, it was not possible to tell her. Mistaking her silence for agreement, Winifred went on: "*Friends with yourself.* That's a very useful motto to take with you through life. Why," she admitted cheerfully, "if I let myself get worried about my work, I shouldn't be able to do it at all. When I first qualified as a doctor, I used to take my patients to bed with me. Metaphorically. And then, perhaps, I wouldn't be as fresh as I wanted to be in the morning. So I gave up worrying. And I take things as they come. And that's why I'm a comfortable person to myself. And comfortable to be with."

"I should think," said Jean, eyeing wistfully the delicate blue crêpe at Winifred's throat, "that would be easier for you to feel than me."

"What, comfortable?" repeated Winifred, surprised. That must be the last of the dreams for to-day, she was thinking, or she would never be able to catch up on her time-table. Lady Hollerton must have her full hour, and there was Dorothy to pick up for lunch.

"Your life—all this——" Jean looked despondently round the consulting-room with its high, dim ceiling and pale, uncluttered carpet, and back to Winifred's robust and competent figure, dressed with expensive disregard for the moment-by-moment cares that were Jean's life.

"If you mean I've had success," said Winifred with energy, "it's perfectly true. But a career—any career—is always a second-best to a woman. Marriage and motherhood are the most wonderful things in the world." She smiled at her patient brightly. "There must be people like us—doctors, I mean. But people like you are more necessary still."

"But if you really thought that——" broke in Jean impulsively, and then stopped, blushing all down her neck. How could she—how *could* she have brought herself to say something so awful?

"I should have married and had children myself?" Winifred concluded for her in the most matter-of-fact tone in the world. Ignoring Jean's blushes, she murmured, eyes averted, "There was a man once . . . I was engaged . . . He died. . . ." She paused, and waited for the sympathy which patients always lavished on her when she told them of her tragic past. Sooner or later, one always arrived at this particular hurdle, and she had long since learnt to avoid its embarrassing implications. She wished, though, that patients would have the decency to look a little less self-conscious. Their apologies and blushes were no compliment: they were a clear give-away of speculations and criticisms which were no part of their business. Nothing showed more clearly how they had been turning over her own affairs in their minds instead of concentrating on their cures.

Jean, however, was innocent of speculation. Pressing her burning cheek against the pillow, she raised wet and adoring eyes to Winifred's bleak and ageing face. She had always considered medicine a noble profession, but never till now, she thought, had she properly appreciated its selfless nobility. Winifred was *beautiful*. Yes, and with beauty that was more than skin-deep. Beauty of *character*. "Oh, I *am* sorry," she stammered, eager to make amends for her terrible tactlessness. "I didn't realise. . . . It must have been awful. . . ."

Winifred bowed her head, accepting the homage. "And that's why I never married," she explained gently. "I always thought love is *so* important."

Dejectedly Jean agreed with her. "I think you were quite

right." Her own marriage with Carey, set against heroism such as this, must appear a tawdry affair.

Winifred raised her head with conscious brightness. Moral ascendancy over the patient had been established again and they were ready to go on to the next thing. The obsessional difficulties had been dealt with. There remained Carey. Carey, who was bored with his wife's meticulous sense of duty, and who passionately resented a wife who snubbed his advances. It was also—and this was more important—time to get rid of Jean. "But it's you we're concerned about. Next week you must tell me more about your own difficulties."

"Oh, if only I could," wailed Jean, who wanted nothing better. "But I do find—you know, all that sort of thing—terribly hard to talk about."

"Yes." Winifred raised an eyebrow and gave her an amused glance of complete understanding. "You don't mind talking about the house—or the children. They're safe. But you always go on the defensive if you think I'm going to touch on sex."

Jean wondered if even her feet were blushing. But she made a supreme effort to get it clear. "I feel so stupid about it. Coming like this week after week. . . . It's as if I'd gone back to my teens. And I feel miserable for nothing." She hesitated, then plunged on with a rush. "I know it sounds silly. But I'm so nervous of talking about it to you."

How they wasted both time and money! Out of patience suddenly, Winifred bent her head and scrawled a pointless note to herself about Jean's resistance. Her tiny handwriting, disciplined over the years into what she considered a distinguished and medical illegibility, was not helped by the very fine nib she habitually affected. Her natural script was large and irregular. She had compressed it to a spidery scrawl. Even so, it burst into flourishes and trailed meaningless threads all over the sheet, at every opportunity flying out of control. The note on Jean remained illegible, even to herself. This would not do. . . . With an effort Winifred controlled her voice, and carefully did not turn her head towards the clock, which she could quite well see while apparently watching the patient. . . .

She knew, without needing to reflect, the answer to Jean's distressed appeal. Ten years of psychiatry provided one with a stock answer to pretty nearly everything.

"You must consider me as a crutch," she began crisply. No. That was the wrong order. Better to start from the patient's angle. "You have a broken leg——" Yes, that was it. Intent on her analogy (how many times before had she not trotted this out for the benefit of a patient who feared dependence?) Winifred missed the startled recoil in Jean's eyes. She went on in her best committee voice, admiring the sound of her own detachment. "You have a broken leg, and I am the doctor who mends it for you. You *lean* on me till you are stronger. Then you throw the crutch away and use a walking-stick instead. And lastly there comes a time when you no longer need a walking-stick, and you throw away the walking-stick too. You——"

But here the telephone bell cut short her monologue. Relieved, Winifred crossed to the bureau and picked up her engagement book, throwing the rest of the sentence over her shoulder. "You will forget all about me when you are better——" With the receiver at her ear she said curtly: "Hallo . . . Speaking . . . Who? . . . *Who?* . . ."

Jean pressed her thighs together and tried to stop their trembling. She found herself tying the fringe of the rug into knots and hurriedly undid them. The sight of her short fingernails, ugly with overgrown cuticle, repelled her. Winifred's hands were flawless, with pale and polished nails. She tried hard not to look at Winifred, taut and consequential at the telephone, but the room, indeterminate like Jean's own appearance, held no focus of energy to compare with the dynamite that was Winifred. Only the chrysanthemums flaunted their bunched and tawny petals, as if summer, that had doused the green glare of the beech trees, the blue glare of the river, burnt on here in undiminished strength. Jean could not help listening to Winifred's end of the conversation.

"What is it you want me to do?" she was saying. "Yes, I will certainly recommend that your wife has a house of her own. . . . Yes, I will write the letter, but I cannot let you have

it before the end of the week. . . . Yes, I am extremely busy. . . . Well, it will help me if you will write to me in the meantime, giving the name and address I am to send the letter to. . . .” Jean could hear the man at the other end still agitatedly explaining when Winifred hung up the receiver.

Winifred remained standing. Her sister Dorothy, she reflected, must already be in the neighbourhood of Harley Street. Buying, in all probability, some lovely and capricious thing which she did not need, and paying for it with money which she had not earned. Winifred looked at Jean, effaced and exhausted on the couch, and said more kindly: “You’ll forget all about me when this is finished.”

“No,” breathed Jean. Slowly she rose from the couch and walked to the sofa where her brown mackintosh was folded. It was too long for her, making her feel frowsty and shapeless as she stood by the door looking wistfully at Winifred. The doctor’s bedside manner, the lovely voice, the support of the compelling personality had somehow vanished. In their place Jean could see only the successful professional woman who was conscious of her own strength and took pride in it. How could she help feeling contempt for a weakness she could not share and would never be called upon to suffer?

Jean experienced panic. Did Dr. Orwin imagine that love could be turned on and off like the depressing of a switch? There was discordance here. But Jean had no words to express her dim conviction that powerful emotional ties continue their awkward and vital life long after their outward forms have disappeared. They survive absence, treachery and the slow passage of the years. The two women faced each other across a room that had suddenly widened to enclose the whole world.

“Come along, Mrs. Martin,” said Winifred briskly, and flung open the consulting-room door. She followed Jean silently to the hall and shook hands with her under the daylight of the central dome. Thus spotlighted, she presented to Jean’s anxious affection an expressionless mask. She was very white, and the skin round her unsmiling eyes was engraved with the tension of an enforced, habitual composure.

But as Jean turned to go, a miracle happened. The ageing

face relaxed, its sternness vanished, and an enchanting bloom of youthful happiness shone from the mask that only a second before had stared at Jean with complete passivity. For one ecstatic moment Jean thought that Winifred must be smiling at her. But feeling, rather than hearing, something move behind her back, Jean glanced quickly over her shoulder, and caught the expression of a young woman who was shyly and adoringly smiling at Winifred, as she laid a bunch of white dahlias on the hall table and slipped out by the front door. Jean turned again to Winifred, and in that instant the mask re-established itself. Looking her full in the eyes, Winifred said remotely:

“Good-bye, Mrs. Martin.” .

IV

YET WINIFRED had spoken truly when she told Jean that she had always considered love was *so* important. The incident of which she had given to Jean but a hint was indeed true. Only a detail here and there was falsified. And at this interval of time, for it was many years since Clifford Forrester had written that cruel letter and the bottom had dropped, as she told Dr. Treherne, out of her world, one could see details of the past but dimly. It might have happened exactly as she told Jean. Or it might have come about in some other way. But whether by life or by death, the reasons were of infinitely small importance. What mattered was that she had loved Clifford Forrester, and somehow their love had stopped. And she had never loved anyone else. Nor for that matter had anyone loved her. There was that one sharp, sweet, agonising encounter. A kiss in a taxi. A proposal of marriage during a country walk. And then the futility of doubt. The dwindling of joy. And, finally, silence. . . .

It was during her third year at Walthamstow that she was

introduced to Clifford, and even at the time he had seemed too good to be true. Elaine Thorogood introduced them. One might have guessed that anything Elaine did would turn out badly for oneself. Elaine was one of the junior nurses at Walthamstow and was both unpopular and envied by staff and patients alike. She was a flamboyant young woman, working only for dress money, and given to forgetting diet sheets and mislaying specimens. But because life is unfair she collected more dance dates than anyone on the staff, while Winifred, her senior by six years and graduated from nurse to social worker, seldom found anything amusing to do during her free week-ends.

So that when Elaine invited her to make a fourth at a tea-dance one Sunday, Winifred, after some hesitation, accepted. They were going, Elaine told her, she and two young law students, Norman and Clifford, to the Castle at Richmond. Elaine however did not intend to dance. She intended to be left alone with the fourth man of the party, who was on the point, poor darling, of popping the question and needed a lot of help. She hastened to add that it would be plenty of fun for Winifred, because Clifford Forrester was "quite definitely some female's cup of tea", and Winifred was to be sure and wear her garnishings. She knew she could count on Winifred to be a sport.

So Winifred went to the dance and Elaine disappeared with Norman, and before the evening was out Clifford and Winifred were offering their congratulations to the newly engaged couple. . . .

To Clifford, however, the engagement was a disaster. The two young men were living in rooms near Regent's Park, and taking up again in earnest the law career they had abandoned in 1914 to join the Army. They were both ambitious, and had pledged themselves to celibacy and work until their positions should be established. But neither could settle easily into the forgotten routines of private study. In future, Clifford considered, it would be more difficult than ever. The long, private evenings of reading and discussion were over and nothing could recall them. Norman was out with Elaine; or, even

worse, brought Elaine to the rooms, and Clifford was obliged to slink away, making some silly excuse, to the cinema or the public park. His self-regard was wounded, and, more dangerously, his feelings of tenderness and of identity in a worthwhile purpose were deprived of an object. Elaine, with her firmer grip on life and her jealousy of the masculine friendship, made a point of urging him to remain, but he knew very well he was not wanted, and the sight of Norman making an ass of himself was too infuriating.

In this mood Clifford brooded on revenge. But there is not much that a young man in this twentieth century can do to hurt a friend who deserts him for a woman. So Clifford began to look round—unconsciously at first, but later with a determination to pay Norman back in kind—for someone who would take Norman's place. Elaine had been looking round too for someone to take the obtrusive Clifford off Norman's conscience. It was at an unfortunate moment for all of them that she thought of Winifred. . . .

"Your case-histories must make interesting reading," said Clifford to Winifred one evening in his cool way. He was watching her across the table with a curiosity that was neither acute nor impersonal, but suggested thrillingly the quality of both. He had driven her in his car to a hotel near Richmond, and they were sitting at a table by the low hedge between the garden and the river's towpath. Few people were about, for it was early in the season for boating, and the evenings, though long, were still chilly. The year was 1921.

Winifred wished she were more free to talk. "People are quite astonishingly different from what they seem," she agreed eagerly. "The most insignificant people often have the strangest histories. In fact, the showy ones are often the dullest. The law of compensation perhaps." But she did not look as academic as she sounded.

"Have another drink and tell me all about them."

"I think I've had enough——"

"Nonsense. You must learn to take your drinks like a gentleman."

Clifford tipped up the gin bottle and found it empty. A

waiter, alert for orders, hurried across the lawn from the steps that led up to the bar, where other couples, like themselves, were buying for a few glasses of beer or spirits, half an hour's worth of romantic titillation. The waiter returned smartly, having correctly gauged the atmosphere by the hedge as 'serious'. He was expecting a decent tip and got it.

"Now go on talking."

To her surprise Winifred found it quite easy to talk to Clifford. Usually she was shy with young men—too quiet or too ingratiating. "What is it you want to know?"

He shrugged his shoulders, but let her see that her opinions were important to him. As for Winifred, she was dazzled by his astringent good looks, his Saxon tallness, and the disdainful, indolent swing of his shoulders as he turned from law to motoring, or from the perpetration of an epigram to the contemplation of women.

She laughed outright. "Do you want my family history, or shall I talk shop? Or what?"

She looked so charming sitting there, her self-consciousness for the moment in abeyance, her hair glowing tawny-blonde in the fading light, that he felt a momentary impulse to stroke with his finger-tips the bare arm that lay on the table, so amusingly ignorant of the A B C of the technique of an *affaire*. He leant back on the hard, green chair, stretching his long legs. "Your job. Your boss. What time you get up. How you repel importunate relatives. Whether you murder your patients. And if so, how you get away with it. Anything for a story."

Winifred said boldly: "We don't kill the patients. Though sometimes they think we do. But the serious cases go to a mental hospital. We admit nobody unless the prognosis is good."

"Full of good works, aren't you? Proper little blooming wonder." But his smile robbed the words of mockery.

"I'm only the social worker," she confessed.

"How did you get the job?"

She looked away from him, following with her eyes a wisp of straw that floated on the surface of the hurrying water. The

smell of water mingled with the piercing smell of newly scythed grass, full of orchis and moon-daisies. "I did my nursing training at Birmingham," she told him unwillingly. The past, she feared, held no glamour. "Then I heard that Dr. Treherne—our medical superintendent—wanted a social worker. So I thought I'd apply." She clasped her hands bravely in her lap and said: "That's how I came to know Elaine." The statement was a question.

"Oh, Elaine . . ." The negligence of his voice sent wave after wave of relief sweeping through her, so intense that the willows swam out of focus and the pewter of river and sky were one blur. She said awkwardly: "Elaine's terribly popular, isn't she?"

"But not at the hospital, I suspect," he drawled. "I'll wager you've forgotten more about nursing than she ever knew."

Suspecting him of irony she was uncertain how to reply. "Well, I liked it well enough at Birmingham," she lied at last. "But I'm happier in the job I've got now."

Dismissing the hospital with sudden lapse of interest, he asked: "And your people? Do they approve of all this?"

"Oh yes." She felt easier with him now. "My father's a parson, you know." She shook her auburn hair back from her ears. She wore a page-boy cut, with a sleek, short fringe. "Our church is on the marshes—in Norfolk. My sister Dorothy lives at home and does the housekeeping for them, and mother and father run the parish."

"Then you must be the emancipated one," he commented dryly. The evening light robbed him of colour, so that his rather long, narrow face, with the deep dent between his brows and the cleft chin and the strongly marked lines at the sides of his mouth, watched her as impersonally as a mask. But he continued to draw her out in a half-teasing kind of way. It was his most amiable mood, and she had the sense to be natural.

"Dorothy's being married shortly," she told him. She began to describe Dorothy: her popularity ("She won the prize for being the most popular girl in the school"): her Greek goddess profile ("She's the beauty of the family; my brother and I

simply don't get a look-in when she's around"): her 'way' with the parishioners. It was the first time she had realised that Dorothy might be an asset. "Charles—my future brother-in-law—well, everyone likes him——" She sketched Charles for him briefly. He was the right sort of brother-in-law, enjoying the correct occupations, and more at home on the Bench or at the agricultural shows than in a drawing-room; and Dorothy could shine where Charles was deficient. As for Antony, the young brother, he was doing well at Oxford, and was 'a dear'. It was evident that Winifred adored him.

"Funny little thing, aren't you?" Clifford put an elbow on the painted table and leant his chin on his hand, giving her his full attention. Beyond the low brick wall at their feet, the river cascaded by like bubbles on cider, and the clapping sound of oars came clearly downstream to them from a solitary dinghy. The scene was set for romance and Winifred was in the mood for ardour. She forgot for once that Dorothy had always had all the admiration, and that at school the girls had laughed at her and called her 'the Winifrump'. *The ugly duckling of the family*. . . . But for once it did not bother her.

He asked her about psychiatry. Her knowledge, which was eclectic and not profound, did well enough to start a conversational hare and he followed it expertly. But all the while their youth and the darkening sky and the placid river tuned their attention to a more archaic theme, and passion of a sort arose inevitably, and aroused in each an individual response. Sincerity is the final standard, and Winifred's was sincere. Clifford was remembering Norman, and his grief was not yet ripe for assuagement. Meanwhile, Winifred sat there, fruit for his plucking, and did well enough, Clifford thought, as a foil for Elaine. Her brains were unremarkable, her manners perfect. She could, by any standards, be introduced at home to his mother and sister. . . . Especially to his mother.

WINIFRED CLOSED the front door on Jean Martin, and hurried back into the central hall of the Harley Street house. Here under the daylight of a central dome she made a rapid calculation, adjusting the flat gold plaques holding her wrist-watch. Lady Hollerton would probably arrive at a quarter before the hour for a noon appointment. Dorothy must be fetched from the club before one. Thirty-five minutes would have to do therefore, thought Winifred grimly, for the Bentley woman. And she thought: 'Neurotics deserve all they get, for they do not stand on their own feet; if I paid for an hour I should see that I got it.' Neurosis, it had correctly been said, was a character disorder.

"Come along, Miss Bentley——"

Lydia Bentley, clutching her scarf and her gloves, jumped up with alacrity. She had fallen into a sort of doze, perched on the edge of the leather arm-chair in the big waiting-room which was the original dining-room of the house. She saw very little of her surroundings. Like an archer whose focus of vision is one circle and one only, while fields and hedges waver on the periphery of his attention, Lydia took in nothing but the dim gilt face of the clock on the mantelpiece, over which scarcely moved, or with paralysing slowness, the lacy, gilt hands, while eternity took over from time the unending minutes. Screened from the narrow sky by the filter of net at the long windows, the room around her was all rich and copious like a Victorian novel. But she did not see the Dickensian sideboard and the muffling magnificence of the Turkey red carpet. Dr. Orwin was already thirty minutes late.

Lydia had made a half-hearted attempt to forget Winifred. She had opened *The Times* and forced herself to read a couple of letters. She had stared at the illustrated magazines. Under her hand, pictures of film stars, pictures of kings, were flicked over, coalescing fitfully to one unremembered image. Then she pushed them away and looked again up at the clock. Its works

disappeared into the interior of a Doric temple. Fluted black pillars flanked the face.

At last the sound of doors opening and shutting reverberated through the silent house. No voice penetrated to the waiting-room, but lifting her head to listen more intently, Lydia caught a glimpse through the window of a tall, stooping figure, shapeless in a brown mackintosh, making off in the direction of Oxford Street. Then came the sound of heels clicking on the tiles of the vestibule, and silence took over once again. Lydia resigned herself to wait, but the handle of the door turned, and there was Winifred standing framed by the white light from the hall and smiling at her. So great was her relief that for a moment Lydia felt the blood sing in her ears and her breath draw in difficult jerks. Then Winifred said cheerfully: "Come along, Miss Bentley—" and the bowed legs of chairs rounded themselves to solidity and stood foursquare with the table on a carpet of crimson.

"And I think my mother was a sensitive and imaginative woman," repeated Lydia, who was filling in some details of her case-history. "She was small and slight like me, but she had a lot more energy. I often wish I were like her."

Lydia turned on the couch, pillowing her cheek on her hands, so that she could watch Winifred more closely. She was a small, slight woman herself, with a narrow, oval face, framed by masses of dark hair that fell limply from a centre parting, to be twisted in a loose knot on her neck.

"Tell me more about your mother." Winifred kept her voice soft.

"She died when I was six. I told you last time, didn't I, how my father adored her?"

"Yes, she must have been very charming." More charming, considered Winifred, professionally appraising, than her daughter, who for all her attractive fragility looked 'odd'. The two sides of Lydia's face were asymmetric, which perhaps accounted for a peculiarity that had puzzled Winifred during their first session together. To meet Lydia's full and direct glance was to receive an impression of melancholy—almost of defeat. But her left profile startled one by some obliquity of

line that suggested malice, or at least wisdom. Lydia, however, feeling all of a piece with herself, was ignorant of the discomposure her face exerted.

"I remember her very well," Lydia was saying. "When I was a small child, we lived in a cottage on the marshes, and all my memories of that time are tangled up with her. And with the lovely, flat country that lay between our cottage and the sea——"

"Such as——?"

"A heap of things." Lydia's wide mouth parted in a smile. Speculatively she sought the doctor's face, wondering how much of the precious, unrepeatable past could be shared, and, if shared, understood. She rubbed the back of her hand, rather wearily, across her forehead. For one so small, it was a surprisingly muscular hand, broad across the knuckles and long in the fingers. Frustrated pianist, of course, remembered Winifred, and tried not to sound impatient. Would-be artists were dreadfully tiresome, as she had remarked only yesterday to Dr. Treherne. Sooner or later, one needed to speak to them very bluntly. But for the moment she let the criticism pass. There was still plenty of material to elicit, and Lydia would provide her later with a better opportunity for a piece of straight, very necessary advice. She remarked kindly: "Your memories must be very precious to you. What things stand out most clearly when you look back to those first few years? Before your mother died, I mean?"

"We had a row of wild cherry trees that bordered our path to the front door," Lydia told her slowly. "In May the branches all foamed over together, but between the stems you could see the distant marshes. And violet clouds like rods in the glinting water." She paused. "Is that the kind of thing you want me to remember?"

"Go on," said Winifred, head bent, her fountain-pen poised above her note-book. Her voice sounded very remote.

"We had log fires in the winter," said Lydia uncomfortably. She hoped Winifred would not think her critical. Perhaps it was unwise to mention those lovely, roaring, crackling fires of one's childhood in this cold room where even in the depths of

winter, one had to keep warm by a gas fire only half turned on. For Winifred blamed the Labour Government for the fuel shortage. Tactfully not seeing the fireplace, Lydia let her unfixed gaze come to rest on the bureau. Unlike Jean, she was not disturbed by the disorder of the pigeon-holes and the drawers that did not quite close. But she noticed the jar of chrysanthemums, burning bronze against the colourless wall, and said suddenly: "How lovely your flowers are. I've only just noticed them."

"They are nice, aren't they?" agreed Winifred. "I had them sent in." They were Maisie Lawrence's gift, of course, and Winifred could not but be grateful to a patient who always anticipated one's needs. Many patients brought her flowers, but only Maisie thought of sending flowers in on a Monday morning from a neat-by florist's. Common sense like that saved one money. And avoided famine-and-plenty, which always exasperated her. "But you were saying——? Something about fires——?"

"Oh yes," said Lydia, relieved. "Well, actually they used to frighten me rather, because they used to sputter out so dangerously. Mother used to read aloud in the evenings. Hans Andersen's fairy-tales. And I remember shedding tears into the coal-scuttle once for Rosalie in *A Peep Behind the Scenes*. But Mother put the book down and told me I could fetch the kittens in for a special saucer of milk, because it was a wild evening. Mother was wonderful, really. Once when the snow drifted for days around our house and the trees were like black skeletons with thin fingers, Mother said: 'Yes, but there's still gold on the gorse——' And I ran out to see, and she was right."

Winifred was scribbling fast. 'Inclined to pose. Mother-fixed.' She looked up from her note-book to ask: "You spoke last week of your stepmother. Was the family situation happy after your father re-married?"

Lydia's eyes clouded. She took a deep breath and twisted the fringe of the rug tightly round her fingers. When she spoke again her words were slow and laborious.

"No, everything changed. My stepmother was a good

woman by suburban standards, I suppose. She moved us from the country, where Father and I had been contented enough in a ramshackly sort of way. And I was sent to the High School, and dolled up like the other little girls in the neighbourhood—satin coats trimmed with hand-made lace. And lace on my underclothes. No more serge knickers and old jerseys, or tam-o'-shanters for Sundays. We had scenes at first. I lost my temper and broke things every day. And I interrupted at meal-times. Because my stepmother talked on and on, until one thought there could be nothing left in the world to talk about. 'Little girls should be seen and not heard——' That was what my stepmother was always saying."

Her face fell into hard lines, Winifred noted. She had met Lydia's type often enough, she thought, in the Child Guidance Clinic. Little Angela Mainwaring was just such another. It had taken six months to break down Angela's stubbornness. But at forty plus—this woman's age—there was no time to waste, and it wouldn't be worth it anyway. . . . Patch people up: that was all one could attempt. She said casually: "You probably had some reactions to all this. Temper tantrums? Nail-biting? Bed-wetting?" She crossed one leg over the other, shifted her note-book and sat with fountain-pen poised. It was not her habit to look directly at patients while taking down their histories.

A slight flush rose in Lydia's cheeks as she turned away. "I don't know. No one ever told me about it."

"Still," murmured Winifred, considering her notes, and ignoring Lydia's embarrassment, "these things leave their mark. No one can ever take the place of a mother."

"No——"

"And, of course, if your mother had lived, she would have backed up your ambition to be a pianist?"

"I expect so. Mother wanted the best for me." Lydia spoke carelessly but her expression had gone sullen. There could come nothing but pain, she thought, from the revival of forgotten dreams. Thirty years ago she would have talked music to Winifred till the dawn surprised them with sleep. In those years she practised her three to four hours daily, and believed

that nothing could prevent her from reaching the heights. Everyone acknowledged that she was a brilliant executant. But her private dream was to be an interpretative artist, and that was infinitely more difficult. How could one explain at this late date the utter failure of an ambition that had once consumed her sleeping and waking life?

Music was the keynote to her childhood—the childhood from which she had offered a few random memories of snow-drifts, and fairy-tales and cherry trees. But the really painful memories stemmed from an experience that was within her, and was at the same time shared with the beloved figures who were once her entire world. She was fed with music from her mother's arms. For her mother was a pianist, and her father a listener, and both of them impressed on her the importance of the two-fold flow. Music was to be given, and the act of reception was to be deliberate too. And only when the pattern aroused in both composer and hearer the same exultation could the music-making of the executant be called fruitful. The importance of the pianist was stamped thus on her emotions and her conscience in babyhood and developed as her technical skill developed. For she inherited from her father the mathematical ability, and from her mother the emotional excitement, that made music her inevitable career.

But music had proved expensive, both spiritually and financially. It was a discipline to which other values had to be subordinated. Quite simple duties—housework, the affectionate claim of friends on her time and her regard, the lure of reading, travel, expertise in other techniques, and the pursuit of health itself—were expected to give way, and to take a lower place in the hierarchy of unlimited claims on a limited number of hours in the day and of mental and physical reserves of strength. Spiritually, Lydia was lavishly extravagant of her resources. Financially, she was without reserves. When she was sixteen her father died, leaving what little money he had saved to his second wife, and Lydia discovered what it was like to be utterly penniless in a world where spiritual values were profoundly despised—even a butt for derision and a focus for malice and hatred.

The second Mrs. Bentley had no patience at all with Lydia's intention to continue her studies. She had not interfered with the music lessons while her husband was alive, for she admitted that Lydia played 'nicely'. But when it came to a question of one's livelihood one could not be too careful. No one seemed to do themselves much good in these artistic careers. And now that the money was so small Lydia would have to get a job as quickly as possible.

It was true there was not much money. When the lawyers had finished with the estate, a bare £4000 remained to be invested at an interest of five per cent. But Mrs. Bentley, very generously, she considered, paid £50 to a well-known secretarial school near Victoria, so that Lydia could be started in a job that would at least keep her. Mrs. Bentley then cleared what she could from the auction of house and furniture and retired to a boarding-house, where she narrowed her attention to food, clothes, fantasies of past wealth, and the dream world of the 'pictures'.

With neither money nor a piano for practice, Lydia made a conscious *volte-face*, and promised herself, with a kind of trembling horror, that she would never again touch a piano. To music one should give all, or, if that were impossible, nothing. She would not become a dilettante of the piano—careless of technique, and only exploiting her acquired dexterity to soothe her own private anguish or to 'show off' to others less gifted than herself. She loathed sentimentality and the exploitation of the personal. She put a distance between herself and the lonely, austere, dedicated practitioners of the art, who were in the fortunate position of being able to sacrifice their human needs to the demands of its discipline. She could not do this. She had to earn her living and eat not less than two square meals a day. The City engulfed her. . . .

Winifred was turning back the pages of her note-book. "You started to train for a musical career when you were nine," she read crisply. "Your stepmother considered it too precarious or a livelihood." She looked up to enquire: "You mentioned something about a concert before your father died?"

"Yes," said Lydia dully, "I made my *début* at the Aeolian

Hall. But that was the only time I played in public. Father died, and I had no money. My stepmother paid for me to be taught shorthand and typing instead."

"And so you took up office work?"

"Yes."

"I was right," thought Winifred complacently, and closed her big note-book with the gesture which meant: Time for you to go. She was pleased with the accuracy of her diagnosis, for Lydia had only been under treatment for a few months, and she had diagnosed hysteria within the first ten minutes. It was a familiar story. Ambition, frustration, and a second-rate job in a second-rate office. Then rebellion and the flight to illness. She had heard it all dozens—hundreds—of times before. And she knew exactly how to handle it.

"All the same," she remarked thoughtfully, as Lydia tucked the heavy strands of dark hair under her cap, "you must have done pretty well to have kept your job so long. You are over forty, and you have been independent since your 'teens. That's a pretty good achievement."

Lydia drew on woollen gloves, smoothing them carefully over her broad, muscular hands. "If these stupid hands of mine hadn't gone back on me," she said, looking at them with curiosity, "I would still be doing my job quite well. As it is, I must get better quickly. The money my stepmother left me isn't enough to keep me indefinitely—that is, if they got worse."

"No, of course not," agreed Winifred. "But this tremor you complain of is quite a temporary condition."

"Do you really think so?"

"I'm sure of it," said Winifred firmly. She was wondering how she could keep Lydia's appointment as usual on the following Monday morning. Her diary appeared to be booked solid: Lady Hollerton had demanded the eleven o'clock session. Surtax payers could not be hustled. . . . But she put down Lydia's name. "Well then, same time next week, Miss Bentley." She smiled suddenly, for the morning had passed fairly quickly after all. "I think you're still regretting the musical career you wanted when you were a girl. Think that over during the week, and we'll discuss it next time."

"Oh, I don't think that *can* be the reason," said Lydia, for it was years since she had listened to a concert or touched a piano. "Well, of course, at the time I was very disappointed. My music master thought I ought to turn professional."

"I dare say. But I don't believe you could have brought it off," commented Winifred negligently. "People often return in middle life to some passing ambition of youth. It's a common thing. But it's dangerous. It belongs to fantasy." She opened the door and led the way down the curving, shallow staircase, bare to white light from the central dome over the main hall of the house. "When I was a girl," she told Lydia coolly, as they passed into the vestibule, "I had ambitions too. Rather like yours. I fancied I could make a career for myself as a musician. And I studied very hard, and was very disappointed when it all came to nothing." She fluffed the delicate crêpe at her throat with her finger-tips. Her brooch of enamel flowers twinkled in the pale gloom from the frosted fanlight. "When we're young," she said, shaking hands pleasantly and opening wide the front door, "we have to get even with life somehow, and our ambitions are generally greater than our capacities. But as we grow older we learn to accept our limitations."

VI

BUT IF it hadn't been for Mother, reflected Winifred, on the way to the waiting-room, where Lady Hollerton was peering through the curtains, I would never have considered music seriously at all. And most certainly not as a career. Parents are always the first to know if their children have any special ability, and the last to predict what form it will take. I might have been anything. Now what in the world induced Mother to see me as a musician?

Or did she? . . .

The music lessons began in the autumn of Winifred's eleventh year, shortly after that memorable Sunday evening when Dorothy sang the solo at evening service in their father's church, and leapt to fame between the first and last stanzas of 'The King of Love.' Everything combined to help Dorothy that evening. The mellow light, streaming through the gold west window, added lustre to her pale hair and the grace of her slender, childish limbs. She was not shy, and her voice carried well. The parishioners were loud in their approval, especially the broad-bosomed mother and her diffident daughter who came to supper afterwards. The Rev. Theodore Orwin, a hasty-tempered man, but always benevolent in the company of his flock, allowed his paternal pride a little natural vent. It was Dorothy's evening.

And a week later Mrs. Orwin discovered that Winifred also was musical. "You can tell it from the way the child sings in church," she explained patiently to her husband. "I know she hasn't got the *voice* that Dorothy has, but she is so quick at picking up the new tunes. We're all rather lost now that you've changed the Hymnal——"

"But I've told you again and again 'hat hymn tunes are an affair of habit," exploded the Rev. Theodore. "And a lot of the muck we've been brought up to like is a vicious habit——"

"Yes, dear, I know," agreed his wife placably. "That's why I'm so pleased at Winifred's good taste. She *likes* the new tunes."

"Oh well——" His thunder died away to a distant rumbling. "I don't want to put an obstacle in the child's way if she really has talent." He rounded on his wife with sudden suspicion. "No doubt you've fixed on a teacher for her and got the whole thing settled?"

Mrs. Orwin, bland and imperturbable, met his sparkling glance without a tremor. "Oh no, dear. I should prefer to leave that to you. I'm sure Winifred gets her musical ability from you." She sighed and looked out of the window. "I don't even know of a teacher except that Miss Ledbury who teaches at the High School. She taught Dr. Johnson's children, and got them on very well."

And so it was arranged that Winifred should learn the piano. She and Dorothy attended a good day school in the nearest town to her father's parish. Dorothy was a year ahead of Winifred, and both children were moderately intelligent for their age, and moderately good at games. But Dorothy was the favourite. She was more interested in the other girls and lacked Winifred's drive always to excel. Her ambitions, which were real, were also realistic. She was pretty too, in the accepted schoolgirl fashion. Pink-cheeked and flaxen, with long Gretchen plaits. Winifred was red-haired and heavy-shouldered like her father and took after him in other ways. He was a man given to sudden rages, and had an inexhaustible capacity for work. Winifred now attacked the piano with a ferocity equal to his own, and the family were compelled to develop a protective deafness while, during the next few years, she mastered, with fanatical concentration, the early drudgery of scales and studies which was to make her a pianist.

Her opportunity came unexpectedly soon, during the Lower Sixth year after her School Certificate. She had failed to matriculate the previous July, and was to make a second attempt at Christmas. With a little coaching in mathematics and Latin, she was considered certain to pass. In the following summer, with their Higher Certificate a comfortable year ahead, the Lower Sixth gave an end-of-term party to the staff, and it was Winifred who suggested that this year's entertainment should take the form of a concert.

Here at last was Winifred's opportunity to achieve the lime-light, and she made the most of it. She not only accompanied the singers and her form's one violinist with vigour and sensibility, but put up a very good showing as a soloist herself. Her single-minded attack on the pianoforte now brought its reward, for she was the child of her age, and had quickly sensed the enormous prestige conferred on artists now that the authority of the Church was in decline. The standard of her playing surprised everyone. Sitting up there on the platform in her white linen frock, with its narrow belt, her plaits swinging with enormous butterfly bows, her body seemed feather-light with exaltation from the power that flowed from her fingers.

Ordinarily the hall grand piano was not available to children for practice. There were music-rooms tucked away at the end of upstairs corridors where lessons could proceed in privacy. The hall piano was used only at prayers, or by the V.I.Vs who gave occasional recitals and musical lectures. It had a fine, full tone, and was the best instrument Winifred had played. Inspired by her own success, elation lent her virtuosity.

Her own contributions to the concert, which the girls themselves arranged, were restricted to the classics: a prelude and fugue of Bach, a waltz of Chopin, and some of the more sentimental Mendelssohn and Schumann. She had wondered a bit about the moderns. Henschel or Borowski perhaps. Even a little Debussy. But she doubted if the unmusical members of the staff would be capable of appreciating them.

Her Chopin waltz brought the concert to a close. It was the D Flat Major, ending with a fine and smashing top note on which the right hand pauses, then cascades a couple of octaves to meet the steadying bass, which all the while, in spite of continuous acceleration, has kept the tension within controllable limits. Winifred was not too sure of this top note. It was so easy to slip to the side of it. But excitement bore her on. She landed plumb on top F, and came down in a perfect run which resolved itself triumphantly into the restatement of the common chord. There was a moment of complete stillness before the staff rustled in their chairs and began to applaud.

"I don't know when you get time to practise," said the Headmistress to Winifred warmly, as she thanked the girls for the party and led the staff to the door. Five feet high and grotesquely stout, Miss Martineau dominated them all by her cold and formidable thrust of will, before which the adolescent, crude personalities of the girls, and the wavering, often more delicately sensitive, personalities of her staff, were thrown into confusion. Praise from Miss Martineau could eternalise a reputation.

Winifred's eyes were misty with triumph, her colour high. "I do spend a lot of time practising," she began eagerly. "Music—it's my favourite subject——" But she was conscious of the stillness around her: of the staff, awkward and attentive, their

cohesion already broken into groups of two or three, anxious to be gone: of the girls, deeply envious but ready to explode into congratulations when the staff had left the hall.

"It's your gift for accompanying that I most admire," went on the Headmistress. She raised her eyebrows, and her tone deprecated any exaggeration of a simple judgment. "You can perform too. But accompanying is a special gift. And I see you have it."

It was more than Winifred had dared to hope. Till now Miss Martineau had treated her with reserve, and never gone beyond the answer given once to Mrs. Orwin, who came to consult her after Winifred's matriculation. "Winifred? She has ability, and she applies herself. Both the girls have ability. . . . No, I cannot advise you about a career for her. Except that she would probably do best in some form of administration——"

But music was an Art. Something quite special. You needed to be a very superior person indeed to become an Artist. (Winifred already saw herself in capitals.) Dorothy's singing could not compete, for anyone able to recognise pitch could sing.

She drew a sharp breath and clenched her hands at her sides. "Do you think——?" She faltered, knowing very well that the faces, clustered round like docile and admiring masks, could break up at a word from Miss Martineau; that the malignancy of human pride would be glad to rise and strike her from her sudden elevation above them all. But the occasion might not readily come again. She went on bravely: "Do you think you could speak to my father and persuade him to let me go in for music? A career, I mean?" Miss Martineau was still looking at her with kindness. "I should so like to, but he doesn't think I could do it. If *you* thought so——"

Her courage collapsed suddenly. It was simply Not Done to discuss such a personal and important matter before the school. The blood rushed into her cheeks and suffused the hollows of her neck. Her eyelids pricked, and the muscles in her throat felt rigid as if all the saliva had dried from her mouth. She bent her head, blinking at the swimming rectangles

of the parquet, and waited for Miss Martineau's snub that would humiliate her before them all.

But Miss Martineau said thoughtfully: "It might be a good thing, Winifred. Yes, I will certainly speak to your father." And when she looked up she found them all smiling at her.

Winifred said good-bye politely, collected her music, and walked home sedately, as if the evening were like any other evening of high summer, with no special magic in its fiery dissolution. But she walked on air. Her mind was already ranging beyond the prison of adolescence, and for quite half an hour she felt herself to be already one of the aristocrats of her time—one of the practitioners of sensibility. For the next year and a half she worked harder than ever, neglecting her school-work for her piano practice, and not at all alarmed by her failure at the end of the Upper Sixth year to pass her Higher Certificate. All the great artists were dunces of a sort at school because of their devotion to one thing, and one thing only. To dissipate one's energies was to become a jack-of-all-trades. Dorothy might find such a mode of life attractive, but it was not good enough for Winifred. All that remained was to convince her parents that she, and not Dorothy, knew the formula for success.

VII

BACK AT Hampstead, Dorothy followed Winifred into the white and Chinese green lounge, unloosed her silver fox fur, and peeled off her gloves. "How lovely to be here, Winifred. No wonder you always look so fresh and competent compared with the rest of us." She sank with relief into an arm-chair and opened her handbag. Behind her the french windows were opened on to the grey-green garden, where stripes of purple and scarlet antirrhinums jostled the white irises, and the tall elms threw spears of shadow that broke

abruptly on the veranda to climb the sunny south wall of the house.

"I'm afraid I can't offer you much in the way of a drink," said Winifred with a smile. "Will you have a champagne cocktail? Rather deadly, I'm afraid. Or would you prefer sherry?" She moved with dignity to her cabinet in the corner of the lounge. A pencil of sunlight glowed along the green silk pile of the carpet, and set the glasses a-dazzle as she swung open the polished door.

"Sherry, please." Extracting a mirror, Dorothy held out the handbag for Winifred's inspection. "How do you like it? It's American. I paid nine pounds for it at Debenham's this morning."

"Very nice. What sort of leather do they call that? I like the tortoiseshell handles." Winifred paused, with the glass in her hand winking blue and red like a diamond.

"I don't know." Dorothy peered at her face in the mirror, and pushed a wave of hair under her hat. Her Dresden pink-and-white prettiness had not stood up well against maternity and the advance into middle age. She was now a stout woman in the flourishing fifties, and very well tailored in a black suit. She looked indeed rather too much like an advertisement of a countrywoman up to town for a day's shopping and matinée. She wore a double row of pearls round her firm, broad neck, and her hands, which were large and white like Winifred's, were covered with rings. Energetic and capable, she bustled more than Winifred, and had a nervous trick of shaking her head and blinking her eyes, as if to retrieve an imaginary hat that was on the point of sliding down her neck.

Winifred took a pale and polished box from the mantelpiece. "Cigarette?" She held it out, indicating this side Virginian, that Turkish. "No, have one of mine. I get plenty."

Dorothy looked up shrewdly. "Patients, I suppose?" She went on meditatively: "Sometimes I think you get more out of life than any of us." She did not, however, believe this. Her appraising glance, which missed nothing, had already told her that Winifred's pin-stripe suit and blue crêpe blouse were as

good as her own, but that Winifred was looking washed out. She considered this, and added her private comment that Winifred's type usually ended up neurotic. This unspoken criticism consoled her for the slight inferiority feelings she had been suppressing ever since she came into the room. The crowds in Oxford Street had tired her and she was glad to relax in this cool room, with its white, glossy walls and black woodwork, and its mannered artistry of spaced-out furniture round the green carpet. But Winifred's meticulous background, created to frame her aloofness, often affected Dorothy to a defensive mood. And to-day she felt a special need of robustness to hold her own against it.

"Here's your sherry."

"M'm. It's good." Dorothy set the glass down on a small coffee-table. With her free hand she adjusted the angle of her hat. "But, seriously, Winifred, I don't know how you *manage*. You're so clever with those frightful patients of yours. They eat out of your hand, don't they?" Rapidly she switched to a more personal grievance. "And Miss Begg. . . . How do you manage to keep *her*? I can't get servants. Have you no predatory neighbours?"

"Oh, that." Winifred shrugged her shoulders. "Miss Begg stays because it suits her, I suppose. And patients are a two-edged blessing."

"You look extraordinarily well on them," commented Dorothy, with the nervous blink. And indeed Winifred already looked more animated. The sherry had set a faint flush below her cheek-bones.

In spite of the warmth of the day, Miss Begg had switched on the electric fire. Winifred moved around the room, shifting a jar of white chrysanthemums into a cool corner, and straightening the untidy papers that hung from the crowded pigeon-holes of her bureau. Dark, recessed shelves full of books rose from the floor on each side of the pale green fireplace, and a crystal clock with gold hands ticked gently on the narrow mantelshelf. "I'm very busy."

Dorothy glanced at the fireside shelves. Rows upon rows of books, rather old, but many with the leaves obviously uncut.

"How's Dr. Treherne these days?" she asked with apparent irrelevance.

"She's really wonderful for her age." Winifred strained her ears for the sound of Miss Begg carrying in lunch, but the muffled sounds that came from the kitchen revealed nothing. "She was here to tea yesterday. She'll be retiring in the spring, I suppose. We shall miss her very much at Walthamstow."

"Nice how you've kept up with her all these years."

It was more a question than a statement, but Winifred had parried Dorothy's curiosity before. "We happen to be both interested in psychiatry, that's all."

The expression that flickered over Dorothy's face was too well-bred to be called ribald. But it made Winifred add hastily: "Of course, she's been an enormous help to me."

"As to that——" Dorothy shrugged her shoulders. "You've done very well for yourself, my dear." Indicating with her plump hand the cool elegance of the room and the sun-drenched veranda beyond the french windows. Windless and parched, the garden flamed scarlet, and the clematis and polygonum were a chequer-board of amethyst and ivory on the old east wall. "Sometimes I wish that Charles and I had settled in London."

Winifred felt almost sorry for Dorothy. To a countrywoman Hampstead and Harley Street must seem a pretty good achievement. And no one, thank goodness, could guess the consuming passion that left her still unsatisfied—her craving for a security that always seemed to be waiting just around the next corner. But if she got that appointment to the Regional Board, she *would* be secure. Even Harley Street, where the most brilliant and progressive worked in collaboration with the fraudulent and the specious—Harley Street would bend to her will. . . .

Over lunch in her tiny dining-room, she enquired for Charles. But Miss Begg, in and out with grilled soles and mushroom sauce, followed by watery blancmange with synthetic cream, was a break on further confidence. With her hot red cheeks and over-anxiety to please, it was impossible to ignore her. But at last the coffee tray was brought in and Miss Begg retired to the kitchen.

The delicate austerity of the dining-room now became more apparent. There was the same black and shining woodwork as in the lounge, but here the walls were distempered eggshell-blue, and a deep rose carpet patterned with beige and black deadened the scrape of chairs along the parquet. Rough white pottery with blue and green paint splashes lay on the sideboard, and above them hung the cuckoo clock which Winifred had brought home from an early holiday with Dr. Treherne in Switzerland. Miss Begg liked this clock, which could tell the time certainly, but was also shamelessly unfunctional. It was in a wooden case, carved to represent a chalet. Very ornate. Alone among the doctor's possessions Miss Begg regarded it as truly suitable to the doctor's position.

"She's free for the rest of the afternoon after she's washed up," remarked Winifred, when the click of the kitchen door could be heard. "She has an easy life, really. I suppose that's why she stays."

The sisters exchanged glances of complete comprehension. In the mind of each, Miss Begg existed in a kind of disembodied state, having taken over the attributes of all her predecessors—the 'clean' women or 'willing' girls who had done the monotonous and dirty household tasks for them since as long as they could remember.

"I'm glad she looks after you properly." Dorothy ran her finger-tips along the mirroring surface of the dining-table. "All this glow and glitter. It's positively pre-war."

"So it is. But she doesn't approve of my taste, you know. She said to me wistfully the other day: 'When things get normal like, you could treat yourself to some real nice cushions and carpets, couldn't you now? Of course, these plain things do very well for a turn, as you might say, but in your position——' "

They both laughed outright. Miss Begg awakened echoes of the past, and induced in them a simplicity which they had long outgrown. A constraint lifted, and when Winifred renewed her enquiries for Charles and the family, Dorothy answered frankly:

"We have to make too many economies these days. The Grange has a lot of character. But when we bought it we expected help in the house, and Charles can't manage the land alone."

Winifred, stirring another lump of sugar into her coffee, said thoughtfully: "Will the family always be so scattered?"

"Even if they were home, they couldn't do much," said Dorothy quickly.

"I think that's a pity." Indeed it was a break-up. For Dorothy's home at the Grange had been the real centre for the Orwin family during the last twenty years. After their father's death, Mrs. Orwin had moved into a villa which was ultimately to become submerged by new housing estates. The beech woods went down before the stucco tide that flowed northward from London, and the country parish where the girls were brought up was now the name of a station on the outer fringe of the thinning northern suburbs. But Dorothy's Grange, though threatened, was still surrounded by genuine agricultural country. Its unmanageable core, the vast and inconvenient kitchens, dated from the sixteenth century. Successive owners built on to them. The charming front, red-bricked and bow-windowed, was Georgian, and here the family of Charles and Dorothy lived in rooms that opened out from each other and were difficult to heat. But this mattered little before the war. Charles had a fair private income, the farm paid its own way, and there was nothing that anyone could teach Dorothy about running a house with economy. She had the knack of collecting friends, and the house was none too big for her constant house-parties.

"It's been a sad time for Moira."

Dorothy blinked and nodded. She had contracted the habit in her 'teens, and seemed to have outgrown it after marriage. But latterly she had been a bit on the jump altogether. Of her three children, Moira, widowed by the war, was doing a secretarial job in London; Arnold, the eldest son, was in the Army; and only Phoebe, nineteen and still deliciously irresponsible, remained at home, like the princess in Dorothy's private and arrogant fairy-tale for her children.

Winifred, who admired Moira's independence, considered Phoebe too pliant and Arnold too good-natured to develop into anything better than well-mannered nonentities. She returned to the subject of the Grange. Surely Dorothy did not really want to sell the house. It would be a reversal of all their plans.

"I don't know."

Winifred was impressed by the odd little flutter in Dorothy's manner. It contrasted strangely with the assurance and charm of her appearance. As the hostess of the Grange and the mother of a family, Dorothy seldom showed herself on the defensive against her emancipated younger sister.

"Well—— Yes, I suppose a country house *is* a little unmanageable nowadays. But isn't the land supposed to be a national asset?"

"One would think so from the speeches of politicians." Dorothy was staring at the picture above the mantelpiece. "That's new since I was here last, isn't it?"

"Copy of a Constable." Winifred looked up at it with affection. "He lived near here in Well Walk. I've told you about this before, haven't I? In one of his letters to Dean Fisher, he said: 'Our little room commands a view unsurpassed in Europe from Westminster Abbey to Gravesend'. Presumably that's the view."

"H'm. Our view from the Grange is much less distinguished. But, such as it is, we should miss it if we had to leave."

"Where would you move to?"

"That depends," said Dorothy, abandoning the Constable.

"I can't see Charles in a town somehow."

"Nor can I."

Winifred, wondering how long Dorothy intended to stay, since she herself was due at the hospital at two-thirty, asked Dorothy if she would take more coffee.

"No, thank you. It was simply lovely. . . . Winifred, I really am rather worried about all this. You know how we live down at Farehamstead. Charles and I run pretty well everything in the neighbourhood——"

"I know," murmured Winifred. "The Women's Institute.

The Conservative Association. And the Agricultural. And Charles a J.P.”

“That’s just it. We’ve done it all for too long to change. Besides, it’s the right niche for Charles. And then we’re used to entertaining. We should miss that dreadfully. But I’m not getting any younger, Winifred.”

Winifred, regarding her sister thoughtfully, was astonished to find herself remembering, of all people, Jean Martin. Jean, drooping in a brown mackintosh, her discouraged back dwindling down the long funnel of Harley Street, and out of Winifred’s mind until her next appointment came round. Not that Dorothy was one to dwindle. Sitting there below the cuckoo clock, there was no shade of alteration in the competent finish of her appearance. Only her skin sagged a little below the jaw, her head jerked a thought too recklessly. Winifred said briskly: “Your time’s your own, of course, but I can understand you hate the drudgery.”

Dorothy glanced at the delicate blue walls around her and sighed. Winifred’s entire dining-room was not much bigger than her own refectory table, planned for amusing parties before the war and assuming a whole kitchen wing of docile servants. She went on recklessly: “Charles doesn’t help very much. He’s a dear, as you know, but he *enjoys* being Bohemian.”

It was really time to leave for the hospital, but Winifred pushed her cigarette-case towards Dorothy. “I don’t think anyone cares at all about that sort of thing nowadays. Have a cigarette.” She got up for matches, and, holding the light steady, said serenely: “The way we were brought up—it’s *vieux jeu* for the younger generation. I’ve always thought Charles’s indifference to that sort of convention rather attractive.”

Dorothy smiled suddenly. “Do you remember the week-end you stayed with us? Our Member was speaking at the village hall and lunched with us first——”

“And Charles was to be chairman——”

“And he was just getting into the car when I discovered he hadn’t changed his trousers—

“And you hustled him upstairs—

"And made him peel off his corduroys—

"Dear Charles! It's too bad to laugh at him."

"All the same—" Dorothy frowned a little, and Winifred was again reminded of Jean—"we can't go on like this much longer. With a house like ours, we're expected to entertain. And I'm fifty-two. Charles three years older. What will it be like in ten years' time? The Gange is too big for us." Through the open window the lavender hedge in Winifred's tiny front garden was almost within reach of plucking, but the spiked, white railing beyond it shuttered their privacy from the leafy and faded street. "As for the land, it stands to reason Charles can't do the work of three labourers."

"No, that's impossible."

Dorothy stubbed out her cigarette and pushed back her chair. Standing up, she hitched her shoulders briskly into her coat, gave a sharp pull on the waistband of her skirt, and made the other little movements of a woman preparing for departure. "Your lunch was delightful, Winifred. We must meet more often. But I simply must fly now. This talk has done me a world of good."

Winifred looked at her sister with tranquillity. "I'm sorry I can't be more helpful with suggestions." She moved to the door. "Your things are in the lounge, I believe. Would you like to go through while I leave a message with Miss Begg?" She waited for Dorothy to pass, then stepped into the kitchen to tell Miss Begg she would be early for dinner. She had the queer feeling that she had just told a patient to dress for the street. Mounting the stairs to her bedroom and tidying herself for an afternoon at the hospital, she turned this novel discovery over in her mind. When she came downstairs again, she could see through the open door of the lounge Dorothy's back outlined against the door to the veranda. The garden beyond lay stuporous in the afternoon sunshine, divided only by the columns of shadow falling northward from the line of elm trees, through whose branches the indiscriminate gold picked out here the porcelain petals of antirrhinums, there the pricking purple of clematis. Dorothy pulled on her gloves and slung her furs elegantly from one shoulder. Faintly between the elm

trees a light wind reached Hampstead from the heights of Epsom Downs and St. Martha's Hill.

"Where would you like me to drop you?" asked Winifred politely.

"Nice of you, Winifred. Anywhere near Oxford Circus, if you're going that way." Dorothy followed Winifred into the car, and said vaguely: "I'm meeting Moira at the club after I've finished shopping."

"Does Moira still like her job?" Winifred slipped into gear, and the car rolled smoothly down towards Primrose Hill, later to follow the Outer Circle to the point where the pleasant northern suburbs terminate abruptly at Marylebone and Euston Road. "When she last came to see me she was full of enthusiasm."

"Moira likes it well enough," Dorothy told her. "We hear very little about it, as a matter of fact. She's always out to parties. Her friends give her no rest. I never knew such a girl for collecting friends."

"And Phoebe?" More and more Winifred had the fancy that here beside her was not her sister Dorothy, the Lady of the Manor, but a more familiar figure—the anxious housewife who so often droned and complained in her consulting-room, and went so touchily on the defensive if anything one said appeared to criticise her tiresome children.

"Well really, Winifred, there was something I wanted to tell you about Phoebe, but it's a little difficult to——"

"Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Oh dear, no." Gripping her handbag between the tortoiseshell handles, Dorothy began to talk quite fast about Phoebe. Her visits to London, her clothes, her charming unsophistication, and her popularity with girls and young men of her own age. Winifred was surprised. It was not like Dorothy to spin a subject out unless she was trying to avoid some embarrassment. Keeping up her own end of the conversation with an occasional "Oh, did she?" and "How delightful!", Winifred began to wonder if Dorothy really had got something on her mind. The tinkest grin, instantly suppressed, quivered on her thin lips. 'Really,' she thought, 'the situation is getting quite

clinical'; all the same, for Dorothy to shy at a subject before dear little sister Winifred—it was comic, whichever way one looked at it.

But they were skirting Regent's Park before Dorothy came to the point. The dashboard clock stood accusingly at twenty minutes to three. The clinic patients, Winifred was thinking, had been shuffling their bottoms on the hard bench outside her room at Walthamstow for at least the last half-hour, sitting silent and depressed in the corridor. And a gust of impatience swept through her for all discontented women who demand so much from life, and manage to obtain for themselves so little.

"We're nearly there," said Dorothy.

Struck by something in Dorothy's manner—hesitancy perhaps where one had grown to expect only social competence—Winifred said sharply: "My dear Dorothy, stop beating about the bush. It's not like you to avoid coming to the point. The child's not ill, is she?"

"No, she's not ill. No. . . . But she's going to be engaged."

Winifred flashed a deliberate smile to the left seat of the car, and swung smoothly round into the broad thoroughfare of Marylebone Road. "But that's most exciting news. Who is the lucky man?"

"Nothing's settled yet," Dorothy assured her unhappily. "But young Nigel Forrester wants to marry her."

"Nigel Forrester?" repeated Winifred, and gripped the wheel as if to protect herself from a blow. With an enormous effort of will, she drove on, swaying very slightly, not seeing the road, but staring ahead with wide, dilated eyes, her mouth stretched in a wholly unnatural, unmirthful smile. "You don't mean——? He's not——? Would that be Clifford Forrester's son?"

Dorothy could read nothing from her expression, which was quite blank, but under the flare of lipstick Winifred felt that even her lips were cold.

"Yes," said Dorothy with diffidence. "You remember Clifford, I expect?"

Just in time, Winifred worked her throat and found words to carry her through this shock. "Oh yes, I remember Clifford

very well. . . . But this is delightful. When did it happen?"

"I was quite sure you wouldn't mind," Dorothy hurried on apologetically. "Clifford—— It was over so long 'ago. You're such a celebrity now." She waved her hand comprehensively at the car, as if all Harley Street and Hampstead were symbolised by her sister's firm, cold hand on the wheel, and the sharp pressure of her foot on the accelerator.

"My dear Dorothy——" Winifred sounded lightly amused, even a little contemptuous, at her sister's hesitations. "I'm more than pleased. You must tell me all about it."

Relieved, Dorothy leant back in her corner as the car swerved to the right and slackened its pace down the shadowed canyon of Harley Street. She adjusted her furs and said with a touch of complacency: "He proposed to her on his last leave. He's twenty, you know. A year older than Phoebe. Moira introduced them at one of her parties. Phoebe was up for the week-end with Moira——"

"Nice for Phoebe to have an elder sister to take her around," commented Winifred, as they passed her consulting-room on their right. "And Moira has so much *experience*."

Dorothy flushed. "She only goes round with the nicest people," she interposed quickly. "Nigel was quite a pet of hers, and she was so anxious he should meet Phoebe."

"Well," smiled Winifred. "You must hurry up and announce the engagement so that we can send our congratulations."

"We're waiting for Nigel to be demobilised. After that he wants to farm. Like Charles."

"And can Clifford put up the money?" The question was so matter-of-fact, so much the obvious concern of an affectionate aunt, that Dorothy was unable to construe it as a slight.

"We should naturally put up a share ourselves."

"Of course." Absently and regretfully, Winifred let the subject slip, as if it were, after all, as good a topic as any other to bridge the gap between the real business of lunch and her engagement at the hospital. "Well, my dear, here we are in Oxford Street. You go west, I suppose, and I go east. It's been simply lovely seeing you. Tell Phoebe I'm longing to see

her and hear all about her plans. I only wish," said Winifred, smiling brilliantly, "I were free to spend the afternoon with you, but my hospital's waiting and I simply must fly." She put up her cheek for a kiss, and the sisters parted with warm expressions of goodwill.

Winifred released her brake with a jerk. The gears crashed. Awaiting her opportunity she slipped into the line of east-bound traffic and headed for Walthamstow. She would be lucky, she thought, if she were no more than an hour late for her clinic.

A pedestrian, happening to notice above the wheel her taut shoulders and the forward-pointing orchids on her small, shiny hat, might have guessed her to be the buyer for some smart store. Or at the least a customer who would exact the most helpful consideration from the sales girls. He would hardly have visualised the white and steel world of the hospital—the bare corridor and the hard bench—the uneasy postures of the out-patients waiting for Dr. Orwin to begin their treatment. Or have foreseen this elegant stranger routing through the files and memoranda in the Out-Patients' Clinic at Walthamstow; and listening, later, in an assumption of affectionate concern, to the case-histories of anxious, quarrelsome and entirely unimportant people. But the pedestrian would have been wrong to judge by appearances merely. "I like to look nice in front of my patients," Winifred had explained more than once to Maisie. "Unless I can put up a good showing myself, how can I possibly help them to face up to their difficulties with courage?"

VIII

BUT EVEN in the beginning, thought Winifred, as she swerved past the vans and omnibuses that bowled westward from the City, Clifford had never been reliable. There was

always, she thought, some secret dissatisfaction in their relationship, 'or else why should she have found it necessary to put him to the test? It was true that her engagement was unexpected by everybody, including herself, and that it lasted only a very few months. But they *were* engaged, and the end came so suddenly that even to this day she could not be sure what had happened. He said he loved her. He gave her a ring. He told his family they were to be married. And then, for no adequate reason, he disappeared out of her life. And a few years later she saw the announcement of his marriage to Kathleen Symonds in the *Telegraph*. Perhaps that visit to the Symonds in Wimbledon ought to have put her on her guard. But how was one to know?

They visited the Symonds shortly before Clifford's proposal to marry her. It was at Clifford's suggestion. Mrs. Symonds and Kathleen were old friends of his, he said, and he very much wanted Winifred to meet them. He could call for her at the hospital at six, so that they could get to his friends' home in time for supper.

"But we don't close the office till six," Winifred objected. "I should have no time to change."

He assured her there was no need to dress. The Symonds were very ordinary people and would be put off if she arrived looking too grand. "They'll give us a meal when we arrive, but it'll be called supper, and they'll expect you to go through to the kitchen afterwards and dry the dishes—or at least offer to."

Winifred's slight look of surprise was not lost on Clifford. "But perhaps the visit would bore you," he added politely.

"No, I'd like to go," she said hurriedly. Clifford had been reticent, so far, about his background. But the set of his shoulders, his long, fair, narrow head, and his easy way of swinging himself about would look more natural in Bloomsbury than Wimbledon. She laughed a little at the absurdity of her assumptions about him. But she was glad she had such a lovely dress for the occasion—powder-blue, with a skirt that trailed and dipped, hiding her long, sturdy legs. It had cost her a month's pay in Shaftesbury Avenue and was worth it.

Her other frocks, seen through Clifford's eyes, would appear, she could now see, immature, bourgeois. The powder-blue expressed all her long-pent, avid, rebuffed appetite for frivolity. Safe, too, on the score of taste, for she did not yet know what to expect of the Symonds.

But Clifford's friends proved disappointingly plain. Their flat was in the unfashionable part of Wimbledon. The approach to it was through acres of stone and brick, where the dust-coloured, occasional trees could not assert their individual richness against so much mortar and decay. Kathleen, too, was a surprise. She was a year or so younger than Winifred, and impenitently without style. Her welcome, however, was unexpectedly warming.

"Do you do a job?" Winifred asked her after supper had been cleared away. They sat on the settee companionably, while Mrs. Symonds knitted, and Clifford watched the two girls from the most comfortable arm-chair.

"I was a cookery demonstrator," Kathleen replied cheerfully. "I had to give it up when Mother—" she nodded to the knitting figure opposite and lowered her voice—"got ill last year. Mother can't hear very well, you know."

The heart-shaped, wrinkled face above the knitting lifted, as if Mrs. Symonds knew with her mind what her dulled ears were unable to catch. Winifred met a glance of such penetration, such intimate, instant recognition of her secret, that for the moment even the physical presence of Mrs. Symonds subtly changed. Then the knowledgeable, bright eyes fell back to the ceaselessly working hands, and once more Mrs. Symonds was an invalid, with unfashionable, dragged-up hair, splayed hips, and black, woolly stockings. Winifred said awkwardly to Kathleen: "I'm so sorry. That must be rotten. For both of you."

Kathleen did not invite sympathy. She was a girl with blunt, flattish features, a readily-smiling mouth, and rather beautiful, widely-spaced eyes. Built like a countrywoman, at a time when all feminine London tried to look like *la garçonne*. "I'm not clever," said Kathleen simply. "Running a flat is about all I can do. But I admire girls like you who have interesting

jobs. Clifford was telling us about the psychiatric hospital——”

“Yes,” said Clifford briefly. “Winifred’s a career woman.”

There was a moment’s silence, during which the clicking of the knitting-needles was the only comment on this remark. Feeling herself judged, Winifred turned, embarrassed, to Kathleen. “That sounds frightful, doesn’t it?”

“No, I don’t think so,” said Kathleen calmly. “We were interested. We told Clifford he must bring you to see us.”

Mrs. Symonds, for all the world as if she had followed this conversation, added placidly: “Clifford’s a good boy. He knows he’s welcome here, and any friend of his is welcome too.” Her eyelids flickered, and the snapping glance took in all of Winifred’s discomfort with what might have been irony. “But now that we’ve seen you, my dear, we’re glad to have you for your own sake.” Her smile was without malevolence.

Perhaps after all, Winifred wondered, there was nothing to be afraid of. Perhaps her carefully prepared façade of sophistication was unnecessary here. In spite of one’s boyish, cropped head, and the costly simplicity of the powder-blue frock, one could afford to be young. Clifford himself seemed to have shed ten years. He reminded Winifred now of her own brother Antony—unsubtle, honest. She could not know that she too was affected by the atmosphere of the house, and that here, under the scrutiny of his friends, she was more attractive to Clifford than she had ever been when they were alone.

The evening ended with a game of rummy which Mrs. Symonds played like an expert, and a snack supper by the fire. Winifred was so much at home by this time that she rose without invitation and went through to the kitchen to help Kathleen cut the sandwiches. But, once alone with Kathleen, her feelings of separateness revived. They had no common interests, and with Clifford’s absence the bridge of sympathy they had been building all the evening collapsed. But Kathleen appeared not to notice. She tied an apron round Winifred’s waist and brought her the loaf on a platter.

“Here’s a lettuce,” she said, diving into the larder. “It’s washed but needs cutting up. And here’s salmon. And salad

cream and mayonnaise. I don't know which you prefer. Can you manage the sandwiches?"

"Perfectly well, thanks." Winifred was over-affable to compensate for her earlier feeling of ill-will. It was so easy to despise Kathleen.

"Good. Then I'll make the coffee." Kathleen smiled intimately at Winifred. "Clifford's a terror for coffee. We always say he needs a pot to himself—he's so greedy. But there. Most boys of his age want something stronger. Mother won't have gin or whisky in the house to offer young fellows. Beer or cider—we keep them for those who like it. But Clifford always chooses coffee. But you know all about his tastes, I expect."

Winifred, who owed her initiation to drinking to Clifford, stared at Kathleen, the breadknife arrested halfway down the loaf. Not noticing her guest's astonishment, Kathleen was filling the percolator from the boiling kettle at the side of the stove. "Now the milk," said Kathleen happily. "I'll stir it if you don't mind. It's so beastly with skin." She added with sudden anxiety, "Are you sure I'm not giving you too much to do?"

Later, Winifred remembered the affability, and how charming she herself had looked, with her hair metal-smooth beneath the lights, and her feeling of aliveness because they all tried to make her happy. She could not guess, when she and Clifford groped their way down the narrow, uncarpeted staircase of the flats, stopping at the bend to wave good-bye to Kathleen, still framed in her lighted front door, that this first visit, so full of pleasant promise, was to be the last. Clifford put a hand under her arm, and they strolled up to the main road to get a taxi.

"Well," he asked, hunching his shoulders further into his coat, and staring ahead to the main road, where the tiny, bright buses rushed by, leaving a stream of light to dissolve slowly into the surrounding darkness. "How do you like the Symonds?"

Once away from them, Winifred's own critical sense reasserted itself. Her voice took on the faintest shade of patronage.

"They're very charming." Her arm grew heavier, on his hand. "And they like *you* very much. But, Clifford, I've been wondering all the evening——" She hesitated, anxious not to disturb their present sympathy, but needing to put a distance between them both and Kathleen. "Do tell me, how did you first get to know them?"

He glanced at her anxious profile and was silent for a moment. When at last he spoke, she fancied he was smiling to himself in the darkness. "Kathleen was at school with my sister. She stayed with us once when she was a kid. We kept up with her vaguely, and when I came to London my sister asked me to look them up."

"I see." A family affair. She could take it as a compliment that Clifford wanted her to know his sister's friends. But it was odd all the same that he should continue to bother with the Symonds.

She considered this while they passed the last few houses, and it came to her how little she knew of Clifford's life apart from Norman. Whole areas of his experience—of family, of friendships—were still unknown to her. And yet she was sure that she had come closer to him this evening than she had ever come to anyone except her brother Antony. A tram swayed and clanked past them, blazing with lights, empty of passengers. She wondered whether Antony would ever marry anyone like Kathleen.

"I shouldn't have expected your friends to be quite like them," she said cautiously.

But Clifford was already bored with the Symonds. "They're all right for an occasional evening. Listen, Winifred. I want——" But before he could say what he wanted, a taxi-driver, with dewlaps and button eyes was drawing his car alongside and inviting them to jump in. Clifford helped her in and shut the door carefully. London disappeared, there was an overwhelming smell of leather, and all humanity collapsed and dwindled to the breadth of the driver's uncaring back.

When they were safely on the way, Clifford put his arms round Winifred and kissed her competently on the mouth. It

was her first kiss, and after the moment's shock she gave way completely, and let herself be carried away on a tide of passion that left her horrified and trembling. For she was twenty-six years of age, and one *ought* to be kissed before twenty. Yet somehow it had never happened to her. Kissing had even seemed slightly revolting. She had steeled herself to talk of it at the hospital as if a kiss meant nothing. And indeed, as common sense suggested, if one were to marry at all, one could not escape the preliminaries. But there was something to be said for virginity even in the sphere of kissing. It made one's first kiss with the man one loved an altogether overwhelming experience. Deeply ashamed, but eager for further humiliation, she put her arms round Clifford's neck and parted her lips to receive his deliberate, ruthless, almost insulting, caresses.

But her second thoughts were less happy. She knew so little, in spite of the Symonds, about Clifford, and, after all, kissing was little more than a social habit. If only it hadn't happened in a taxi. Taxis were so common. And it was all so unexpected, so surprising. Out of keeping with the Clifford who only drank coffee and visited elderly invalids who knitted. . . . 'He *must* marry me after this,' she thought, 'or I'll never get over it' . . . And then followed the agonising doubt: how many other girls has he kissed in this casual way? Did he kiss Elaine?

But her anxieties proved unnecessary. For, a few days later, Clifford took her in his car down to Surrey. And there, against an appropriate background of sweet chestnuts climbing a grassy rise from a pool surrounded by oaks and dried mud, Clifford formally proposed marriage. He kissed her again beside the bramble hedge, and there was even a sunset to throw their long shadows across the pool. It was all very romantic, and she gave the only possible answer. Clifford had obviously expected this, for when she said 'yes', he produced the ring from an inner pocket. It was one sapphire, and caught the light that still lingered in the eastern sky.

Her family hid their surprise, Dorothy was frankly and charmingly envious, and the nurses told each other that Orwin was a deep one. For once, Winifred felt more sophisticated

than Dorothy. She was able to say, after a week-end during which Clifford was displayed to the rectory: "Of course, Charles is a dear, and we all love him. But I must say, I shouldn't care to settle in the country." She stole a glance at Dorothy, who was flattening her curls in the mirror into a fair imitation of Gladys Cooper's, and said superiorly: "Clifford's my type, of course. I could never cope with country society—being polite to a lot of deadly women with long purses and a couple of ideas. I like intellectual men. And, of course, Clifford's going to be a barrister——"

She left the future vague, but managed to convey brilliance: suggesting the company of artists (one knows how interesting they are), and barristers (to whose knowledge of life Charles could never attain), and rising politicians (so exciting to know what is going on behind the scenes). "Of course, Clifford was first attracted by me because of my connection with psychiatry. It's so important for him to have a wife with brains as well as looks."

For the future seemed bright. At the age of twenty-six, a young woman who ardently desires to be established may well feel some anxiety if no eligible male has so far proved up-and-coming. Winifred knew plenty of men through living in London and working at the hospital. She got on superficially very well with them. But somehow just nothing had come of it all. She met them, and wore her smartest clothes, and talked, she was quite sure, with sense, but not too much sense. And they were polite to her, and left her for empty-headed chits who behaved like tarts, or pudding-faced domestic drudges with no clothes sense at all. Of the first, Elaine Hendrake, *née* Thorogood, was the prototype. Of the second, one might perhaps single out Kathleen Symonds. Bachelor woman or spinster, one would hardly predict for either of them a delightful husband and all the intimate charm of an established family position. Winifred felt herself much more suited for marriage than such creatures, and could only marvel that none of the men she met appeared to share her evaluation of herself.

The engagement therefore seemed to her both inevitable and perfect. The purity and intensity of her feeling for Clifford

bore within itself a capacity for exteriorisation. It felt to her like something so solid that one could hold it in one's hand, and yet vast as the material universe itself: impossible to ignore it, or to push it out of one's calculation. Love like this could not exist without reciprocation. It was inconceivable to her that Clifford's feelings might be less whole-hearted, less all-consuming, than her own. •

She played her psychiatry for what it was worth, and did not suspect until long afterwards that it was the only card she held that was any good at all against Kathleen. It was all very agreeable, and when Dr. Treherne invited the pair to dinner to meet herself and Dr. Dewey, Winifred's happiness touched its peak. It was true that Dr. Treherne did not appear altogether at ease during the dinner party; that her congratulations, to one who knew her as intimately as Winifred, sounded perfunctory; and that her comments on their future plans gained in asperity as the evening wore on.

But the next morning, when Winifred brought in her diary and the morning's mail to Dr. Treherne's office, the older woman greeted her with kindness. "Now don't ask me what I think of the young man, my dear. •I've only seen him once and I distrust rash judgments. But if you think you can pull it off, I hope you'll be very happy." Winifred laughed with complete assurance. "Of course we shall be happy. I know I shall have to make adjustments. It will be an entirely new life. But Clifford and I seem to be made for each other."

"I hope so." Dr. Treherne suppressed a deep sigh, and began to look through the morning's correspondence, sorted out for her on the desk. "Well, if anyone can make a success of it, my dear, you can. Perhaps I'm a selfish old woman and don't like change at my time of life. Yes," she said, her brown eyes beginning to sparkle and her wide mouth expanding in a pleased smile. "That must be it. I ought to be ashamed of myself. I *am* ashamed of myself. But you know what I feel about you, my dear, and you must make allowances. I do want you to be happy." She patted Winifred's arm, blinked, and addressed herself to the letters.

"I shall be happy," said Winifred, smiling a little secret smile

of impatience, importance, and sheer, irresistible excitement. Happy? She felt she had never known before the meaning of the word. . . .

It wasn't real, she told herself, and backed her car into the car-park reserved for the medical staff at Walthamstow. It wasn't real, or something went wrong. . . . The hospital was uncannily quiet. Windows were open everywhere, but patients were taking their afternoon naps. A little group of nurses hurried past her, carrying note-books, their feet smacking down on the asphalt; they noticed Dr. Orwin and lowered their voices. . . . It wasn't real, but I never properly understood what happened. . . .

Winifred avoided the main entrance, with its turret, its big four-faced clock, its enquiry office, and its too-talkative porter. She slipped in by the west door and hurried up the staircase on the far side from the lift. She was not worrying about the patients, and it did not occur to her to wonder what Sister Andrewes had been doing with them since lunch-time.

IX

SISTER MARTIN and Sister Andrewes had finished their lunch by one-thirty. They emerged from the basement dining-room and made for the front staircase to the lift on the hall floor of the administration block. "What's cooking this afternoon?" asked Sister Martin, *sotto voce*, and grinned. "Talking of cooking, I'm in the last stages of nervous dyspepsia. After coping with Stannick all morning—'Yes, Mr. Stannick; no, Mr. Stannick; it shall be seen to right away, Mr. Stannick'—I'm set down to a *foul* meal that would make the strongest stomach retch. And my stomach was never my strongest point."

"Bully beef rissoles——" chanted Sister Andrewes below her breath.

"Cozy slabs of pale cabbage——"

"Potatoes with a stone in the middle——"

"*Duff——!*"

"In fact," murmured Andrewes, in a fair imitation of her lecture manner to probationers, "only the great devotion we feel for this hospital would enable us, etcetera, etcetera."

"Oh, turn it up," interrupted Martin disgustedly. "Look. Are you free this afternoon?"

"Free? Good God, no." They emerged on to the hall floor of the administration block and marched across to the lift, where they waited, a picture of placid authority, for the cage to descend.

"I've got N.D. clinic this afternoon," sighed Andrewes, as they shot up to the top floor and the nurses' common-room. "Our Dear Winifred. I'll be lucky if I get off in time for supper. Let alone tea. Not a damn thing to do."

"What's wrong with that?" Martin began rummaging in her locker. "If I don't get down to E Ward before Turner's afternoon off, she's quite capable of walking out and leaving the patients to it. Then there'll be bloody hell. D'you want a barley sugar?"

"Thanks. Pay you back some time. What's up with Turner?"

"Oh, Turner's all right." Martin pushed a tendril of hair impatiently under her cap. "It's No. 8. I can't help it if he chooses to run a pneumonia. But Stannick says he's been neglected. Doesn't take into account that E and F have had to be amalgamated, and we're all doing double work. This morning there was the father and mother of rows. Ever heard Stannick on the rampage?"

"Once or twice." Andrewes grinned. "You need me there to handle him. I go all dewy-eyed and turn my toes in."

"Well, for God's sake, come and do an act this afternoon," said Martin distractedly, as she made for the door. "Oh no. I forgot. You've got Nervous Diseases. Well, that won't kill you with overwork anyway. You don't know when you're well off."

"It's a bloody waste of time," retorted Andrewes, who was a

pleasant young woman, and really enjoyed handling sick people. "I'd rather do a spot of nursing myself—if you can call it that—than sit on my arse all afternoon and wait for La Orwin to condescend to begin——"

"What time's the clinic?"

"S'posed to be two o'clock," said Sister Andrewes gloomily. "The patients come at two anyway. Orwin walks in about three. 'Why aren't your records up-to-date, Sister Andrewes?' 'Why this?' 'Why that?' 'Why not the other?' 'Didn't I tell you. . . ?' 'Strewth! One of these days I shall give that woman a piece of my mind, and then things'll happen.'"

"Well, why don't you? It'd clear the air."

"Listen! I thought I heard—— But it'll probably be Dewey. . . ."

Frank Dewey came out of his room on the first floor of the administration block as Winifred hurried up from the west porch. At the end of the corridor the white cap of Sister Andrewes bobbed out and quickly disappeared again.

"Oh, good," said Dewey. He smiled his quiet smile, barely creasing the smooth flesh of his cheeks. His eyes, dark and deeply set, remained brooding and shrewd. He was a small man, spare and dapper in a grey lounge suit.

Winifred stopped abruptly. She was over an hour late for her clinic, but instantly, at the appearance of Dewey, the patients dropped from her mind like stones below the surface of a smooth pond. Soft assurance tempered the shrill note in her voice, which in moments of agitation or hurry alarmingly rose. "Did you want to see me, Dr. Dewey?"

"If you could come in here for just one moment?"

He led the way into his room, crossed to the desk and swivelled his doctor's chair round for her to sit in. It was a bright room, shiny with yellow paint and the high polish of walnut furniture. A green screen hid a couch in one of the corners. Everything in the room was carefully and precisely ordered: the clean blotter, a vase of cornflowers, ash-tray, matches, desk watch, and the opal-shaded lamp on its thick wooden base. He himself sat on the edge of his desk, crossed

his legs, and remarked quietly: "The Medical Sub-Committee are to meet next week."

Winifred raised her eyebrows and waited. She had received notification of the date immediately after the last meeting of the General Committee. Both she and Dr. Dewey had been re-elected to serve on the Medical Sub-Committee, which dealt exclusively with the medical administration of the hospital, and was responsible under Dr. Treherne for the appointment of the Honorary Medical Staff.

"I think it most important we should have an up-to-date man as House Physician," continued Dewey. He studied his finger-nails, fingered his tie, and was careful not to look at Winifred.

Her hand, gripping the swivel-chair, for she distrusted the sitting position when talking business, went white at the knuckles. "I quite agree. We've discussed this before. Dr. Treherne has every confidence in Dr. Colyer."

"Confidence? Yes." In no hurry to proceed, he sat back on the corner of the table and appeared to meditate. "One realises her potentialities as a therapist. That's all the more reason——" Looking up to catch Winifred's eye, he smiled involuntarily. Vaguely he waved a hand. "Wasted, don't you think? I should put her on the visiting staff to get some experience and have a man like Sutherland—or O'Connor—as House Physician. What's wrong with Sutherland? He wants the job."

"There's nothing wrong with him," said Winifred sharply. "But you know what Dr. Treherne feels about resident staff."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Very natural. In her day they never took a woman when a man was available. But that was fifty years ago."

"Dr. Treherne is still the Head of this hospital," Winifred reminded him. "But for her capital——"

Smoothly he interposed: "Quite. But this appointment is *our* affair."

She looked at his greying head with irritation, but he turned away to stare through the open window at the chestnut tree whose branches shaded the courtyard around which the four

hospital blocks had been arranged. Dewey's room, like Winifred's, was on the first floor of the administration block and overlooked the square garden. On the other three sides were blocks for in-patients, and from Dewey's room the balconies of the wards could be plainly seen. The ancient chestnut tree took all the goodness out of the garden, and the grass below was poor and thin.⁶ But the nurses had built rockeries, and a few hardy perennials—nasturtiums and buddleia, marigolds and snapdragon—were crowded into the small pockets of soil.

Untroubled by⁷ Winifred's scrutiny, of which he was well aware, Dewey continued to regard the chestnut tree with a friendly curiosity. A sulky blue sky framed the dark bulk of the upper branches. No movement of wind lifted the heavy clusters of leaves. On the balcony of the south block a bed was being wheeled on to the veranda. He caught a glimpse of an emaciated face turned sideways on a low pillow. Exhaustion and remoteness made it appear almost inaccessible to therapy. Nurses in white and lavender talked across it with professional briskness.

With a suaveness that matched his own, Winifred argued: "Why do you object to the appointment of a woman, Dr. Dewey?"

"Oh, I don't." He looked up at her with mild astonishment. "I only want the best available doctor for this particular job."

It was Winifred's turn to look out of the window. Unrelaxed, the line of her jaw dragged the muscles of her neck, leaving sharp hollows. Her skin was colourless. She went on in level tones, almost mechanically: "It has always been Dr. Treherne's policy to staff this hospital with women. Dr. Colyer has excellent qualifications, and I can't agree that Dr. Sutherland's are nearly as good."

Only a quick blink of his eyelids betrayed Dewey's impatience. "Sutherland has been attached to a psychiatric hospital throughout the war. He's seen a greater variety of service cases than Dr. Colyer has had any opportunity to. Dr. Colyer may have paper qualifications, but she has everything to learn——" He broke off, realising that Winifred had

gone remote from him. Standing there within reach of his hand, her head inclined in polite attention, she was as little moved by his words as if he spoke an alien language. He stood up and glanced at the desk clock. "We'll speak of this some other time, if you don't mind. You've got a clinic this afternoon, haven't you?"

Winifred forced herself to smile, although aware that, having lost his point temporarily, Dewey would gently and formidably bring it again to her notice. For all his air of reasonableness, Dewey was as fanatic if he felt a principle were involved, as she was herself. "Good gracious, yes. The patients will have given me up." Reluctantly she began to unclasp the hook of her shoulder cape. Beyond Dewey's head, a small mirror by the door reflected her flowered toque. A shaft of light from the window lay across her mouth. I need a lighter shade of lipstick, she thought critically, and remembered Antony's last letter. Evocations of trees overhanging waterfalls, the sound of water hidden below a tangle of fern and wild pear, the mile-long waves that broke on pale beaches, the burning blue of the Pacific sky. "How are you getting on with your book?" she asked abruptly, turning at the door.

"Nice of you to ask." Dewey's clean-shaven face confronted her with an ironical passivity. With his shrewd and watchful eyes, and plump, unlined cheeks, he looked almost ageless. He was two years younger than Winifred, but the difference might have been ten years in either direction. "I'm finding it rather heavy going. But I hope to have it off my hands before the spring."

"As soon as that? I shall look forward to reading it."

"I shall be glad to have it done with. I've a full enough time-table without night-work."

Indeed the night-work bothered him. Sitting up late, night after night, after the patients had left him, he grudged the hours spent in writing, which might blunt his perceptions by day when his patients needed him. The books had to be written, but they were a by-product of the job. To Dewey the two-person relationship was everything, and even the relationship carried its own inevitable limitations. His future readers

remained vague, but his present patients were an urgent and immediate problem.

He saw his patients as blind people. By keeping himself in the background, he gave them kindness and the opportunity to tell themselves what it was they were really trying to avoid. Under his hands the lives of his patients opened up little vistas into the hidden life of the heart. Expecting so much of him, they came to him expecting some pronouncement, some final statement of the meaning of their lives—how to live, how to escape, whether perhaps to die. All wanting to escape the prison of personal unhappiness, they asked of him the formula that would transform their lives to glory, or clothe them with enchantment. But he was no magician to rub a magic lamp and kindle for them the glory. In the final action, he thought, we all live to ourselves and die to ourselves. The lamp was in their own hearts. All he could do for them was to clear away some of the débris that quenched the flame.

"You're busy?" said Winifred. It was a statement rather than a question. Remembering how Dewey persistently refused to overcrowd his time-table, she commented, a shade resentfully: "But then you organise your life so admirably. I wish I had the gift."

"Harden your heart, and refuse to take reductions," said Dewey cheerfully. "You won't have any worries then. Aren't the patients enough to have on your mind?"

"Heavens, yes," exclaimed Winifred, who had several important, wealthy patients to visit after dinner. She was glad she was seeing Maisie at six o'clock, for she could invite Maisie to accompany her in the car. Maisie would be touchingly grateful. But she would have to give the patients more time than she could spare, and it would be after eleven before she arrived home for a late supper. And Maisie herself was work. She smiled crookedly. "Just wait till the new Health Act comes on the Statute Book. We shall spend the whole of our eight-hour day filling in forms. One wonders who gets all these forms, and what they do with them. Do we address forms to ourselves?"

Dewey laughed. "You'll be all right. Harley Street has too

much snob value. None of your patients will want you to come into the scheme."

"I suppose you're right." Winifred was unwilling to discuss her own future with Dewey. Curiosity, and a touch of malice, prompted her to add, however: "You'll hardly burst with enthusiasm to enter it yourself?"

He looked at her cautiously. Hard and healthy, she was still smiling, but he thought she was showing her age pretty badly nowadays. She would be an authoritarian old woman with a cold and calculating eye. He said: "We may have to try and work it. Always assuming the unspeakable Bevan doesn't drive the B.M.A. too hard."

"Well——" She pulled her toque a shade further over one eye, catching in the mirror a glimpse of her forced brightness masking exhaustion. "Dr. Treherne will break her heart if this hospital's absorbed. She's given it most of her money and nearly all of her life. She sold her house in Surrey to live in the flat here and be always on the job. She was here right through the war when other people were running away from the raids. I think it's too bad. Nothing will ever be the same again."

Though outwardly, she supposed, nothing would be disturbed. The corridors would still gleam with polish. Nurses would put cowslips or marguerites in the vase to mark the passing of the seasons. With luck there would be a plentiful supply of clean blotting-paper. But inwardly, and essentially, all would be changed. A genteel secretary would cheer the proceedings with relays of tea, while a Civil Servant, garbed as a doctor, would sit at this desk tallying the hours, and patients would grow discouraged with waiting, and the files would fill to bursting with forms. The old parent-child relationship of the family practitioner to his patients would give way to the impersonality and muddle of a government office. Dr. Treherne, and all she stood for, would become a romantic memory, together with the stage-coach and the Victorian Sunday. Winifred shrugged her shoulders. "Anyway——" She paused with her hand on the knob, her face aching with the effort to keep on smiling. "You and I will probably get a packet of work under the new régime."

Dewey joined her at the door. "Do you think so?" He looked at her coolly, eyebrows a smooth oval, pink cheeks placid, oval lines deeply graven from nose to chin. "If I understand our present government aright, you and I will get the cold shoulder when the new appointments are made. We're the backbone of the old régime and the B.M.A." He followed her courteously into the passage, adding lightly, as if by an after-thought: "Harley Street especially. What use has Aneurin Bevan for the Citadel?"

X

AND HE probably meant nothing personal by that remark, she told herself impatiently, as she took out Doreen Hammond's file from the drawer two hours later. Doreen, who worked in a City office, had the last clinic appointment of the day.

It had been a busy afternoon. There were two new patients for preliminary interviews, and three rather unrewarding cases of long standing. The matron of a children's orphanage was the last of these, and Winifred knew very well the woman had no chance of improvement without considerably more intensive treatment. Thrice-weekly sessions for at least two years might produce for her a new and integrated personality. As it was, she came once in three weeks, was too tired at the end of her day's job to contribute much constructive work, and suffered from periods of dizziness in the street which could readily develop into fugues. Life had gone beyond her. Winifred, who could not but admit that Dewey got results where everyone else failed, wondered if even Dewey would be willing to tackle the matron.

But patients could not be blamed for their inefficiencies. It was another matter when one dealt with staff. Sister Andrewes had begun the afternoon badly by producing her records muddled. "And this is not the first time," Winifred reminded

her, "that I have been obliged to correct you. Don't you make a practice of noting down your instructions?"

Sister Andrewes, sure of her ground, looked down at the doctor steadily. She was a tall young woman, deep-bosomed, and had a fine, clear skin through which the red blood throbbed healthily. Her shoulders, thrown back under the starched blue gown, protested innocence. "I don't remember being told about a child. I'm sorry, Dr. Orwin."

"There was a boy——" Winifred frowned, and flipped over the buff-coloured files. "No. I see he's not here. But I distinctly told you last week he was coming. I told you to give him an I.T."

"Oh, it was last week, was it?" Andrewes sounded relieved. "I wasn't on duty last week."

"But Sister Gardner knew about it," retorted Winifred. "Didn't you ask her what my instructions were?"

"I'm sorry, doctor. I'll go and ask her now if you like."

"No." Her level eyes taking in the younger woman's discomfiture, Winifred added: "When I give orders, I expect them to be obeyed. The sick are in our charge, and any negligence on your part may lead to serious results in the future. Please remember that."

"I will, doctor. Shall I go and look for him?" Sister Andrewes, outwardly meek, dug her nails into her closed palm.

Winifred turned away. "Yes, certainly. He may be in the general waiting-room, or you can ask at the porter's lodge where he was sent." She went on more kindly, controlling her irritation: "You won't find him much bother, I think. A straight case of M.D."

Left alone in the clinic, Winifred sat down suddenly. She felt herself breathless, and it came to her as a shock how often these days she found the general inefficiency of the hospital intolerable. Almost she felt it to be a personal insult. Nurses were no longer the cheerful automata they had been before the war. Their minds were taken up with films, with boy-friends, and with plans for off-duty, while the patients had to shift for themselves as best they could. The profession of nursing, as Dr. Treherne saw it in the glow of her generous imagination,

was becoming just an alternative to domestic work or serving in a shop. Girls chose nursing during the war to avoid being sent abroad with the services. Some of these young women, flaunting around in the uniform Winifred herself had once worn, would have been housemaids and kitchen-maids before the war. No wonder Dorothy could get no staff at the Grange. Even the sisters nowadays were lacking in proper respect. Recalling her own career as a nurse before she escaped to psychiatry, Winifred reflected that if she had ever lost the doctor's orders or forgotten the very existence of a patient, she would have expected to find herself fired. And quite right too.

Yet the omissions of Sister Andrewes were hardly sufficient to account for her feeling of outrage. Momentarily, as if waters had parted, revealing on a river bed sharp flints and smooth pebbles, fingers of green weed and the rust of glistening mosses, Winifred sensed in herself a rage that had no justification in the immediate provocation of the sister's forgetfulness. After all, reason told her, nurses were overworked and were doing twice the amount they were expected to do before the war. They were all tired. She was tired herself. When one was tired, one forgot the most obvious things. Names escaped her. Patients told her the secrets that had festered and poisoned for years their relationships with the outside world, and she noted them down; but a week later she found it impossible to recall what they had said. One had to make allowances for the long strain of the war and its aftermath. Perhaps she had not remembered to tell Sister Gardner about the boy. This rage that swept through her in gusts came from an unknown territory. Glimpsing this with panic, shrinking from its implications, Winifred felt with relief the waters close again, obliterating some fear. An obscene thing, horribly for one moment exposed to the clear air, sank from view; and there was again a clear river, on whose shining surface only the blue sky and summer clouds moved as if on a glass.

But to Doreen Hammond, leaning forward from the patient's chair, nursing her knee and shyly studying Winifred's remote profile, there were no hidden depths. . . . Doreen was a slight girl of seventeen, with a too-transparent complexion, over-

expressive brown eyes, light, fluffy brown hair, cut too short, and a sprinkling of rather ugly freckles.

Doreen had come straight from the office to the hospital clinic, not waiting for tea. Every minute, sitting on the bench in the corridor outside Winifred's room and waiting to be summoned to the quiet and lovely session with her beloved doctor, was a foretaste of Heaven. She was almost disappointed when Winifred put her head round the door and said: "Next patient, please," for this brought the end of the session into closer range. But she liked to be the last patient of the day. She could carry Winifred's bag downstairs to the car afterwards, and sometimes Winifred would give her a lift to the bus stop. There was no side—nothing stuck-up—about Dr. Orwin. It was wonderful, when you came to think of it. Doreen had come to think of it during most of her waking life.

"And how is the office job going now?" Winifred asked her brightly. In spite of herself, she relaxed, amused and a little touched by Doreen's frank adoration. "Don't you find it fun now you're one of the world's workers?"

"Oh, it's lovely." Doreen tumbled over her words in her eagerness to tell Winifred all. "I never thought I'd be anything special there, but Mr. Markham said to-day—," She broke off to ask anxiously: "You remember Mr. Markham?"

"Very well," said Winifred gravely. A little horror in a waisted suit and loud, checked tie, floated into her imagination. "You're not afraid of him any more, are you?"

"Not a bit." Doreen opened her brown eyes wider, and said solemnly: "Everything you prophesied to me about that office job has come true." She paused impressively. "*Everything*. Mr. Markham said to-day that it's a long time since he had a girl who kept her wits about her like me." Colour flooded her pale cheeks. "I couldn't have done any of it if you hadn't helped me."

"There now. Isn't that just grand," said Winifred, scribbling busily in the file. "But I knew you'd do it."

"Oh, I just can't believe it. When I first went there I never thought—" Doreen broke off and looked almost incredulously around her. This calm room, with its colourless walls,

its dark floor shiny with beeswax, its roll-topped desk of polished walnut, was a lighted door at the end of a very dark and confused journey. Here the violent emotions, the extremes of anguish and despair, were disinfected of their destructive energy. Here the aim was moderation. The vase of cornflowers struck a moderate, almost suburban note. Winifred's fountain-pen lay on the pink blotter. "You don't mind, do you," she said anxiously, "that I couldn't properly believe you at first? It all seemed so impossible. I thought I was just weak and good-for-nothing. And then those months in bed, and the paralysis——" Very slowly she added: "I'd never met anyone like you before. You were just like a guardian angel——"

Winifred smiled. It was true that if Doreen had not been a patient they would never have met, for they belonged to different worlds. It was the first time in her life that Doreen had been on intimate terms with a woman from the professional, public-school class; with someone who had learnt riding at school, and always took taxis, and shopped in Bond Street. Her chair was set at a slight angle from Winifred's, so that doctor and patient were not directly face to face. Alight with expectation and happiness, Doreen could not keep her eyes off Winifred's smooth and finished gestures: the turn of her head; the lifted, quizzical eyebrows; the glint of controlled amusement in eyes that moved steadily, without surprise; the lovely voice, with inflections that at one end of the scale caressed, and at the other were remote and elegant, expressing all the serenity of a life in which sordid motives were not merely absent but unnecessary. Listening to Winifred's voice, Doreen was admitted to the intimacy, claimed as one of the initiates. She was in love, not with Winifred, but with a way of life. It smote her like a Transfiguration.

Winifred said gently: "Yes. You were very sick when I first saw you. You needed someone to arouse you and bring you back into circulation, so to speak."

"I really thought I was paralysed." Doreen was wistful. "It was really only imagination, wasn't it?"

Winifred shook her head. "My dear, the way you were being shut off from the world—not allowed to make any friends

—being educated by that old aunt, and seeing no one from one week's end to another except sick people! And your mother an invalid, unable to do a thing for you. It was a wonder you kept as well as you did. I think you did the only thing possible under the circumstances. But I'm glad your family doctor called me in to see you."

"And you got me out of bed, and helped me to train for a job." Some astonishment still lingered. "I still don't know however you managed to persuade Dad."

Winifred explained. "It's strange how parents, often with the best intentions, try to hinder their children's development. You see, often people have had some tragic experience themselves, or they have found life too hard for them. Then, if they have children, they try to prevent the children having sad experiences too. I'm sure that's what your father was doing."

"Well, you persuaded him to let me go, so that's the main thing. But if it hadn't been for you, I'd still be a hopeless invalid."

"Yes. You needed my help," agreed Winifred. . . .

For she had made of Doreen's case, she thought with complacency, quite a thing. She had been called into consultation by Doreen's family doctor a year previously. The patient was a bedridden girl, living with her parents at East Ham, and one visit to the home convinced Winifred that Doreen would never recover while she remained under their influence. It was a sad household. There was a worrying, religious father, a nervous, invalid mother, and a history of bankruptcy, followed by unemployment and accompanied by frantic efforts to keep up appearances. Since it was unthinkable for Doreen to attend the elementary school and they had no money for school fees, she was taught at home by her father's sister, an ex-teacher, who had been quietly going out of her mind over a period of years. Even at the time she taught Doreen, the aunt was considered 'queer' and temperamental, and when Doreen was sixteen she committed suicide. Her death, at least, was a suicide equivalent. She died, it was revealed at the inquest, of starvation, though by that time Doreen's father had found employment in a multiple store, and there was enough money

to buy necessities, though still none for luxuries. Soon after the shock of her aunt's death Doreen retired to bed and refused to speak or eat. Her father was not unduly alarmed at first. Like his dead sister, he considered eating vulgar, and Doreen's faddiness passed for a kind of spiritual refinement. But it went on too long. The child was obviously ill. And at last, very reluctantly, he sent for the doctor.

The family physician knew all about the Hammonds, and wasted no time on physical examinations. He took Doreen's father aside, and suggested that Doreen should be allowed friends of her own age and some social contact with the outside world. If they could not afford schooling for her, she could take a job. And there were plenty of other outlets available. The local chapel or the local dance-hall. Companionship, he went on, she must have, or he could not answer for the consequences.

Mr. Hammond, however, could not bring himself to admit defeat. He had so narrowly escaped utter catastrophe when his thriving little stationery business folded up on him during the slump that he was become a man of one idea, and one only. He was determined that Doreen should not become submerged among the vulgar, irresponsible young people who thronged the dance-halls and the cinemas of East London. Even the local chapel, he said, was common, and he disapproved of its worldly activities. In his young days sensible folk went to chapel to worship God; not to swing a badminton racquet about, or to play cards. Doreen, it seemed, was to be as lonely in her East London house as if they all lived on a desert island.

Seeing what he was up against with her father, the family doctor then concentrated on Doreen. But here he met with an absolute blank indifference and apathy. She could not be stung by reproaches, and she refused to be jollied into any show of interest in her own future. At last, after some cunning preparation of Mr. Hammond's mind, the doctor suggested that Doreen should see a psychiatrist. "With these highly-strung girls you can't be too careful. Now with the common run of lassies round here—well——" He waved his hand vaguely, shrugging East Ham from the consideration of all

decently bred folk, and made a note in his diary to enlist the help of Walthamstow. For Dr. Treherne's clinic had a reputation in South and East London out of all proportion to its small size. Mr. Hammond was flattered. A diagnosis of hysteria would have profoundly shocked him, but to be 'highly-strung' was the hallmark of class. He was also frightened. Doctors only called in specialists, he thought, when a patient was practically at death's door.

One visit to Doreen's home was enough for Winifred. She personally arranged for Doreen to be removed by ambulance to Walthamstow, and allowed quite a fuss to be made of the removal. Mr. Hammond was very alarmed by the gravity of Winifred's expression. He was also impressed by her charming voice and cultured accent. Never before had such an obvious lady talked to him in his own front parlour as an equal. When she had finished with him, he was ready to agree to anything. Fervently he assured her he was only too happy to see Doreen in such good hands.

And a few weeks later Doreen was well enough to begin training as a stenographer.

"I still can't quite believe in my good luck," she told Winifred suddenly. "That two months in Walthamstow were the happiest time in my life." She flushed, and glanced wistfully at the cornflowers. "And it's so lovely I can come back here and see you. I didn't know what life could be like till I met you."

Winifred put an elbow on the desk, and rested her chin on her hand. The poised, utterly careful turn of her wrist bewitched Doreen. Winifred said softly: "I'm still not quite happy about your living at home."

"N-no. Dad doesn't really approve of my going alone to work each day, of course." A shiver of apprehension contracted her thin features, and she began to pull at the fingers of her gloves.

"You're quite satisfied they approve of the office?"

"Oh yes. A secretarial job is what Dad likes. But— Oh, I don't know— When I get home, they treat me as if I were a child again. I'm always afraid it won't *last*. . . ."

"What about your evenings? Do you get out to enjoy yourself at all?"

"They'd be horrified," stated Doreen simply.

"I wonder——" Winifred was silent for a moment, turning over possibilities in her mind. "I don't think it's good for you to have no fun. You enjoyed the social activities run for the patients at Walthamstow, didn't you?"

Doreen laughed. "When I got used to them. Yes. I was awfully shy at first."

"So you were. But you did splendidly later on. Listen——" Leaning forward, she outlined a plan to Doreen that had just suggested itself. "There's another girl who comes here sometimes—a patient of mine. She's twenty-five. She comes from a very nice family. Her father's a cashier in a bank. She went to a good school too——" She paused, wondering how far the idea would be practical politics.

"She sounds O.K.," put in Doreen awkwardly.

Suppressing a smile, Winifred explained: "This girl is taking a job in an office like yours. She hasn't done any work since she was demobilised from the A.T.S. She didn't get on there very well."

"Oh, I should think not." Doreen shuddered. One had heard terrible things of girls in the A.T.S.

"Well, I'm persuading her to take up work on her own, but her parents live rather far out in Kent. She's not very robust, and I don't want her to have a long journey into town every day. How would you and she like to share a little two-roomed flat together?"

Doreen gasped. "A flat? *Me?* Dad would have a fit. Besides——" Her face clouded. "How could I possibly afford it?"

"I'd thought of that. You remember our hospital cook, Mrs. Chatlam?"

"Oh yes. She's nice. I used to help her with the dinners when I was on occupational therapy."

"I remember. She took a fancy to you. Did you know that? Well, she lives at Paddington. That's not so far from Charing Cross, is it? And I know she has an attic flat to let, now that

her son's left home. She was asking me the other day if I could recommend her someone quiet for a tenant. She's particular. She'd rather have a nice tenant she could get on with than make a lot of money. I believe it could be managed."

"Oh, it would be just heavenly." Doreen lifted radiant eyes to Winifred. "Do you really think," she stammered—"I mean, it seems too wonderful to be true."

Winifred laughed. "Not a bit." Delicately reassuring, her tone allayed the girl's agitation. "Do you know, I think having a flat of your own would be great fun."

"I don't know anything about housekeeping," objected Doreen, but it was more an enquiry than a statement. No doubt Dr. Orwin could charm away this difficulty as she had charmed other and greater ones. Then her brow contracted. "But what would Dad say?"

"Leave me to deal with him." Winifred nodded confidently. Privately she was sure the parents had had such a scare they would agree to anything. And she knew very well the glamour of her position. To Mr. Hammond, measuring cloth in the multiple store, she was a visitor from another planet. She went on softly: "Imagine running a home of your own. Having meals to suit your own time. Collecting pretty things that give it just your own individual touch. Being able to ask your own friends in to coffee in the evenings. Serving them and entertaining them yourself."

"I'm so stupid." Sudden consciousness of the gap between them drained the colour from Doreen's cheeks. A little pinched, her eyes glittering with unshed tears, she studied her thin and blue-veined hands, still pulling at the fingers of her cloth gloves. It was all very well for Dr. Orwin. She belonged to the class who were always in and out of company. Where you wore your best clothes at home, and rang for coffee when guests called. Coffee! They never drank anything but tea at East Ham. And no one used the parlour, though it was carefully dusted every day for visitors. But there were never any visitors. And Dr. Orwin talked casually about friends dropping in to coffee, as if it might happen every evening! Besides, Doreen hadn't any friends. She'd never been allowed to make them.

The drooping head, the tightly locked fingers, were not lost on Winifred. Quite casually, as if one often did this sort of thing, she mentioned: "I have a home of my own too, you know. How would you like to come and see it?"

Doreen's head flashed upward. "Come and see you in your house?" she whispered incredulously. Through her parted lips she began to breathe very quickly, her colour rising.

"Yes. I live in Hampstead." Winifred reached for her engagement diary. Thumbing over the pages till she reached next Monday, she went on in her clear, cool voice: "After the clinic next week I will take you back with me to supper. Later in the evening I have to visit a patient in Finsbury Park, and I will drop you at your bus stop."

"Oh, Dr. Orwin——" began Doreen, and choked.

Winifred smiled her sudden, dazzling smile, enfolding Doreen in its warmth. It was charming to see the child so happy. "Yes," she said, in the tone of one who has chanced on a happy discovery by accident. "I think a little supper party will do us both good. I will show you how pleasant it is to have one's own home. We will discuss housekeeping. And meals. And furnishings. All the topics dear to the feminine heart. And we'll lay plans for this flat of yours. Do you know, Doreen, I feel quite excited already. I can hardly wait to see you fixed up in it."

"Oh, Dr. Orwin——" began Doreen again.

Winifred glanced out of the window. The chestnut tree, which had listened, impassive, to so many confessions of weakness, should mark such moments as this, when strength returned to the convalescent. It should register this rebirth of hope. The day—Winifred admitted it to herself with a sigh—had wearied her by its futility. Like the shutter of a camera, her mind had darkened on images that flickered and were hastily dismissed . . . the forlorn image of Jean Martin in her brown mackintosh, dwindling down the long funnel of Harley Street . . . Lydia Bentley's hurt, beseeching eyes . . . the clinic patients, unremarkable except for the variations in their degrees of hopelessness. . . .

But Doreen, recovering from a severe neurosis, and in love with Winifred, compensated for many disappointments.

XI

MAISIE LAWRENCE'S appointment was at six p.m. that evening, but by five-thirty she was already watching for Winifred's car from the ground floor window in Harley Street. The house was very silent and the street momentarily deserted. A porter had let her in and then vanished to the basement. Only the tick of the gilt clock in its Doric temple above the fireplace reminded her that contemporary life had not altogether retreated from this quiet house.

Maisie, however, confronted the abnegations of Harley Street with complete mundanity. She was a diminutive, aristocratic woman, exhausted physically by ill-health and frustration, but carrying still something of the dark-eyed glamour that had given her a fabulous distinction nearly half a century before. As a girl she had defied her family and gone on the stage. She still believed she could have made a success of that preferred profession. But an accident when dancing had dislocated her hip, and when she was able to walk again, the right parts just failed to offer. Her stage career was ended, but her energy remained demonic. She bought for herself an academy of theatrical training, and introduced into it as secretary a much younger woman, Clare Stephen, with whom she had been on terms of the warmest friendship during her few blissful years of footlights and highspots. Clare was an actress of genuine talent. But she was a gawky creature, and cursed with a savage sense of humour. After doing very well in a few character parts, she too found herself shelved. She attached herself to the sympathetic Maisie, and together they deplored the insensitive world that had so strangely failed to do justice to their talents.

But as the years went by, small rifts appeared in the friend-

ship. A deprived childhood had given Clare a very, sensible appreciation of the value of money, and Maisie's lavish expenditure on her clothes and on unnecessary equipment for the academy shocked and astonished her. It was no good for Maisie to point out that she herself had paid for the place with her own capital, and that her family had always surrounded themselves with beautiful and costly objects. Clare's dry wit indulged itself at the expense of Maisie's foolishness. Wit sharpened to derision. Derision deteriorated into abuse. Scenes between the principal and her secretary became more bitter and more frequent, and at last a day arrived when Clare rounded on her employer and called her a 'painted harridan' who had brought the academy to bankruptcy by 'acting like a goddam fool'. Even Maisie's devotion was not proof against such cruelty, and when, in 1939, the academy had to close for lack of pupils and Clare took herself off for good, Maisie broke down with depression, insomnia and suicidal tendencies. She was moved to a nursing home, and for a time her case seemed hopeless. Eventually her brother-in-law, a distracted man who had suffered much at the hands of Maisie's sister, discovered Dr. Orwin and handed Maisie over thankfully into Dr. Orwin's care.

From then on, Maisie began to improve, and at the end of the year she was well enough to be pushed into a revolting job as housekeeper in a girls' school. By now her one consolation was the weekly visit to Harley Street. . . .

There were still fifteen minutes before her appointment at six o'clock, and Maisie was beginning to feel uncomfortable below the diaphragm. But when she sat down, a trickle of excitement jerked her to her feet again. She took her powder-box and dabbed anxiously at the wrinkled and lacquered face that peered at her from the Victorian mirror above the fireplace. She had bought a new lipstick with a dash of mauve, and she tried it now, finickingly, on the back of her hand. Then, thinking she heard a footstep in the hall outside, she pushed lipstick and puff hurriedly into her handbag and turned, panting, to face the door. But the sound died away and the house resigned itself again to silence.

To kill time, she pulled out of her handbag Winifred's latest note, received with the morning's post. The note accompanied the quarterly account but softened the emphasis on the pecuniary nature of the relationship between them. It was the merest scrawl on an odd sheet of paper—probably the backing sheet from a patient's letter. But its tone was very warming.

‘MAISIE DEAR—

‘I have nearly fallen asleep over my accounts this evening, but must just slip a note in with yours to say good night and God bless.

‘I am so looking forward to our meeting on Monday. Do try and get all the rest you can over the week-end.’

The cash was in Maisie's handbag, along with a packet of chocolate biscuits for Winifred's tea and fifty cigarettes. She had already given Winifred her month's sweet ration.

For when Clare left her Maisie would willingly have died. And perhaps she would have died if Winifred had not found her, lying pathetically alone in the nursing home, unwilling to speak and closing her ears to the goading, querulous reproaches of her few remaining friends. But Winifred found her, and gathered her in her arms and kissed her. It was at that moment that a new love, as ravaging in its demands as the old, had stirred in her dry and tearless heart. She shifted restlessly on the pillows, and the warmth that gathered in her side slowly surged through the arteries of her thighs and discharged its energy on to the nerve ends of her skin. She drew a deep breath, and the flush spread again through her entire body. Looking up into Winifred's face, she saw the scintillating smile and quizzical eyes that had drawn wisdom from years of familiarity with discouraged bodies and unmanageable emotions. In that instant her personality re-orientated itself and Winifred replaced Clare as the all-important being, beside whom other people, and work, and religion, and her own human dignity, were emptied of significance.

“I don't know why I love you so,” she said to Winifred, when she sank at last on the hearthrug of the consulting-room and

leant her thin cheek against Winifred's knee. "But I just adore you. It's your dear, funny little self——"

Winifred put a hand on Maisie's shoulder. "Look," she said softly. "Your chrysanthemums have the place of honour. They've been so much admired all day. But you shouldn't spoil me so."

Maisie jumped up again and examined them critically. "For once, Winifred, you've got them arranged properly. But you ought to have red flowers really. Deep red against this grey and green."

"But I think they're most charming," said Winifred mildly. "All your presents are so carefully chosen."

"Rubbish." Maisie looked down at Winifred's bent head with a mixture of exasperation and affection. "But you shall have nice things one day, Winifred. My collection of snuff-boxes and the Regency candlesticks. All my treasures will come to you after my death. . . . And they're good stuff."

"But you shouldn't." Winifred spoke very softly, adroitly deprecating the gift but flattering with her gratitude. "What about your nieces and nephews, though? You should get a lawyer's advice, by the way, and have your will made water-tight."

"Lawyer or no lawyer, they'll still come to you."

"My dear, you're too good to me. Too generous. No wonder everyone at that school of yours adores you." Winifred sat very still. She let one smooth hand rest lightly on the other, and her eyes on Maisie were serene and very blue.

Into Maisie's brilliant eyes the resentful memories swept back like a flood. "Talking about the school——! My dear, if this darned place doesn't get me down, nothing will. Miss Taylor's ~~as~~ more fit to be a headmistress than the creature who comes to do the vegetables."

"Tell me," Winifred vibrated with sympathy. "You know how anxious I feel about Miss Taylor. I think you're simply splendid the way you handle her."

"She needs handling, believe me," pronounced Maisie. "When I had my academy I had every single detail organised. Now I've got to take orders from a female who couldn't hold

down a job as somebody's *char*. To have to act as housekeeper to a creature like that——!"

"I know," sympathised Winifred. "I simply can't bear you having to take such a subordinate position. A woman of your personality and talents!"

"It's a life of no dignity," retorted Maisie, and looked enviously round the consulting-room. Nothing, she felt, could spotlight the contrast between her life and Winifred's better than this hour of intimacy together. If one could fill the consulting-room with the clash of coarse dishes, the rich and breathless enthusiasm of adolescent girls released from work, the steam and smells of the school dining-hall. . . . But no. The contrast was too frightful. "If you could only see our procession into dinner. The H.M. first. Me following——"

Winifred saw them clearly enough. Maisie had described Miss Taylor's small body, primly set on legs that moved, crutch-like, to utilitarian purposes only, the Liberty blouse pin-tucked over a shrunken bosom, the virgin and bleak smile that could not soften the malignancy of watchful eyes. But, of course, Maisie exaggerated everything. "You do seem to have such bad luck nowadays, Maisie. I do long for the time when you will have an academy of your own again."

"Yes, the girls have crushes on me, and how can I help it? The whole atmosphere of the school is so utterly absurd. All I can do is to try not to hurt them."

"I think you're simply marvellous with girls," repeated Winifred mechanically. She had been saying this over and over for the last five years.

"Yes, I know I am." Maisie relapsed into gloom. "That's why the Taylor hates me so. But listen. This is the sort of thing I'm up against. I was going along the passage yesterday when one of the housemaids clutched me by the arm. Full of reproach she was. 'Now you just go in there, Miss,' she said, and pushed me along towards the bathroom. 'Why?' I said, and tried to pull myself away. 'Oh no, Miss,' she said, 'you must go in and see that poor child. She's crying her eyes out.' Well, I went in to see what the matter was. And there was little Sally Carstairs in simply *floods* of tears. I had no idea

she felt like that about me. Well, what could any woman do? I had to comfort her somehow. Damn Miss Taylor."

"Yes. I quite agree." Winifred looked thoughtfully at the clock and decided not to pursue further the subject of school crushes. Maisie had an unending repertoire of similar stories. She said brightly: "By the way, you remember that little Angela Mainwaring you sent me last winter?"

"Good gracious, yes. If ever there was a highly-strung child, she was. I thought her rather sweet last time I took them for dinner-break. You've done wonders for her, Winifred."

"Affection and security. She needed them both desperately. I think the mother's beginning to realise that at last."

Maisie took a sharp breath and looked hungrily at Winifred's contemplative, downcast eyes, and the strength and breadth of her that not even the cleverest tailor could quite conceal. "Affection and security—— Yes, it's the only thing that matters. I never had it. And that's what I want. If I'd had it when I was a child, I wouldn't be ill now."

"All children need it," murmured Winifred. If words could materialise, she believed her consulting-room would be blocked solid with this special form of self-pity. Was neurosis merely this backward-looking? If so, she herself was the sanest of women.

"Everyone wants love," retorted Maisie. "Did I ever tell you how I tried to make my mother love me when I was tiny?"

"Yes, I believe you did tell me once, but I'd like to hear it again." On the whole, Winifred preferred tales of the past to conflicts in the present.

"It was terrible," said Maisie solemnly. "You see, our nurse always used to take us down at bedtime to say good night to Mother, and we had to curtsy and then Mother gave us a peck on the forehead. Well, Caterina and I were walking down the big front staircase hand in hand one night, and as we went I whispered to Caterina: 'Listen. When I get to the drawing-room, I'm going to run across the floor and give Mother a *big hug*. She'll be so surprised she'll have to hug me back.' Caterina's eyes popped. 'Oo, you daren't,' she said. 'Daren't I?' I said. 'You just watch me.' Mind you, I was wobbling

at the knees myself, and I had the sudden awful and humiliating suspicion that I was going to wet my knickers. But I held myself tight, and let go Caterina's hand and tumbled down the last few steps and simply flung myself through the drawing-room door."

"And did it work?"

Tragically Maisie shook her head. "Mother was sitting at the far end of the room alone. She was wearing a lovely satin dress, and there was a brooch or comb or something in her hair that glittered like a tiny chandelier. I gave one glance at this terrifying apparition and then my courage failed me. I burst into tears and covered my face with my pinafore. Caterina began to cry too. Our nurse began babbling apologies. Mother was so horrified that she actually got up from her chair and came to us across the room. There was the most delicious scent from her ruffles, and her skin looked white and cold like marble——"

"And did you get the hug?"

"No," said Maisie, and a little flush rose under her eyes. She looked pathetically at Winifred and huddled up her feet like an old woman in a draught. "All Mother could find to say was: 'Good gracious, nurse! Put those children to bed at once and give them a good dose of castor oil!'"

"But how cruel of her!" exclaimed Winifred indignantly.

Maisie drew in her breath on a sharp sob and pressed her knuckles into her eyes. "Of course it was cruel." Her body began to shake, and the tears flowed down her cheeks, streaking the powder, till her thin face was criss-crossed with fine lines of wrinkles and tears. "I can't bear it," she sobbed. "I've not had a chance. I can't go on living without love. I shall kill myself, I know I shall. One of these nights I shall throw myself under a train."

"But you don't mean that," Winifred rallied her gently. "Why, a woman of your gifts and talents! You still have a splendid future in front of you——"

Maisie refused to be comforted. "Housekeeper at that idiotic school——" she began.

"But you won't always be that," urged Winifred, glancing

at the clock. "You'll get your own academy again and be independent." The consulting-room clock was five minutes fast by her watch, but it was time they made a move. "Maisie, look at me. Look up. No, please, don't cry any more."

"But I can't help it," sobbed Maisie. "What do I care about theatrical schools at my age? It's love I want. I want *you*."

"But you've got me, Maisie. I'm *here*. Now stop crying and let's enjoy our time together——"

Maisie shook her head. "No, you don't love me. I've offered you a true, sterling friendship, and you don't value me any more than my mother did." She threw herself on the hearthrug and laid her cheek on Winifred's knee. Her arms were tight as a steel trap round Winifred's muscular legs, her finger-nails clawed into Winifred's thighs. A ridiculous scene, thought Winifred, and checked her anger to say: "I do value your love, but you make such inordinate demands."

Maisie lifted her brimming eyes, astonished. "*Demands?* But I don't demand anything!"

Winifred tried to smile. "Oh yes, you do. And besides—I never make friends with patients."

"But why?" exploded Maisie. "In Heaven's name, why? That's what I can't understand. No. . . . Stop stroking my hair and tell me why you won't love me." She forced Winifred to look at her.

Evasively Winifred said: "I like you very much, and I like to have you as a patient, but I don't love you." She looked up over Maisie's head to the Harley Street skyline, and hardened her voice. "I can't give you what you want."

"But what do you *think* I want?" Feeling that Winifred had gone remote from her, Maisie tightened her grip on Winifred's hip. But Winifred sat on like a rock. It was not the first time that her sturdy physique had protected her from an infuriated or distracted patient.

She said gently: "I've told you this before, Maisie, but you never believe me. Surely you must realise that a friendly doctor is better than a doctor friend." Her thin lips closed on each other. She looked down at her patient and her eyes were bright with amusement. Then, putting an arm lightly round

Maisie's shoulders, she pretended to give a start of alarm. "But look at the time!" she exclaimed. "I have appointments this evening, and I simply must fly——"

Not moving, Maisie said obstinately: "I won't let you go unless you promise to love me a little."

"Then I'll have to go without you," snapped Winifred, and tried to free herself from Maisie's constricting arms.

"All right, you can go, then," retorted Maisie, releasing her, "but I'm staying here." She sat back on her heels and dabbed at her wet eyes. "I mean it, Winifred. I won't go away until I've got *something* from you—if I stay till you come back to-morrow." She saw that this threat had gone home. Winifred turned irresolute on her way to the door.

With a despairing glance at the clock, Winifred softened her voice. "All right. All right." But she felt she could scream. The silly black head on the hearthrug needed a good smacking, and her hand fairly twitched to give it. For it was true that Maisie had distinction, ability, poise—all the gifts that Winifred lacked and yet had somehow managed to dispense with. And Maisie failed to use them except in the one relationship that forced her to seek through life with Winifred a holiday from living. The deviousness of neurotics, distracted as they were by every emotional crook of a finger, appalled Winifred. With half Maisie's wit and none of her charm, Winifred had set her face to one goal, and one only. But who could compel Maisie to face the truth?

"I won't let you go unless you promise to love me," repeated Maisie listlessly from the hearthrug.

The big hand of the clock was approaching the hour. Winifred gave way suddenly. "All right, Maisie. You know very well I'm very fond of you." She bent down and kissed Maisie's hot forehead. It was a small, distant, circumspect kiss. But indubitably and irrevocably a kiss. •

"Now you're being human!" exclaimed Maisie and jumped to her feet. "Oh, I'm sorry to be so awful, Winifred. But I *do* love you. And I need you so badly."

"Yes, of course," Winifred soothed her. "You can't help loving me. And it's quite right that you should——"

"Well then——" said Maisie, and put her arms round Winifred's waist, hugging her tightly, "that's all right. But when can I see you again, Winifred? Because I must have help. I can't go a whole week without seeing you, even if I do telephone on Wednesday and Sunday."

"How would you like," smiled Winifred, lightly answering the pressure of Maisie's arms with her elbow, "to drive round with me to-night when I make my visits? I could pick you up at Chelsea Bridge at half-past eight. And after I've finished we'll have a drink somewhere, and then I'll drop you at the station. How would that do?"

"How would it do?" repeated Maisie in a voice like prayer. "Winifred, you're just simply too adorable for words. *Of course* I want to come. You open the gate of Heaven, and then calmly ask me: How would it do! You darling little thing!" She made no further demands on Winifred's affection, for it seemed to her that she already possessed as much of it as Winifred was capable of giving. Into the prosaic processes of Winifred's imagination she had flung a fan of seed—something jewelled and exotic. There was a scintillation and an unacknowledged flame. "If only," she went on more soberly, "I didn't have to pay for these lovely times by the 'plunge into the pit' afterwards."

"There'll be no 'plunge into the pit' for you to-night," Winifred assured her confidently. She had given Maisie enough warmth to carry her over the next few days, and after that Maisie could telephone. Winifred was thankful that she had so much to give—thankful, too, that her physique had protected her from the nervous instability that might have pushed her into an artistic career. There were many patients, present and past, young and old, who depended on her as completely as Maisie did, and to them she represented life.

To be a successful psychotherapist was more pleasant, and far more socially rewarding, than to have achieved success through the narrow egoism of art. . . .

"I DON'T KNOW, I'm sure," Mrs. Orwin had said doubtfully, when Winifred at eighteen told her she wished to train as a concert artist. "Playing at local concerts is one thing, and you do it very nicely indeed, my dear. I'm sure everybody thinks so." Distracted from her knitting of the rector's sock, she held the criss-cross of steel needles steady on her lap and looked up at her younger daughter's anxious and stubborn face. Competition, she said, was fierce at the top. Winifred had no idea of the gulf between her own attainments and the standard required of a professional. She would have everything to learn.

Twiddling her tennis racquet, for they had played a set after tea on the rectory lawn, Winifred urged: "But look here, Mother, I'm really good at music. Miss Ledbury says I'm the best pupil she's ever had, and even the H.M. thinks I ought to be allowed to go on. Look how she appreciated my playing at the school concert. And you know what a standard *she* has." Miss Martineau, it was clear to the school, would damn even geniuses with faint praise.

"You certainly are good, my dear. I've always said so. But a professional musician——" Mrs. Orwin shook her head. "You don't know what it means." Her eyes left the gauche young figure in white piqué, with a green stain on its tennis shoes, and glanced with humour and more of melancholy round the large and shabby drawing-room. The evening sun, spraying through the branches of the flowerless lilacs that bordered the churchyard's western wall, laid a pale mosaic on the stone veranda beyond the french window. From the strip of lawn between the herbaceous borders they could hear the rector's mower whirr and clank as he drove it energetically up and down, with occasional slips over the verges and much damage to the borders of forget-me-not and London Pride.

"But I'm willing to *work*," Winifred frowned.

"You'd work, I expect," said her mother placidly. "But what'll it all lead to? Teaching little boys and girls the piano, and getting perhaps one really musical pupil in a hundred. And what money do you think you'd get in return?" She shrugged her shoulders. "Starvation wages."

"But you don't understand." Winifred flopped down on the hearthrug at her mother's feet and hugged the tennis racquet round her knees. A basket of twigs, which she and Antony had picked up in the woods, lay whitening in a dusty shaft of the evening sun. The drawing-room carpet, rosy from the tread of many parish meetings, was blue and red round the border, and over a large area of the centre dully grey. "All this—" she looked with distaste at the dangling sock which her mother was now twitching into a comfortable knitting position—"is all very well. But I want to do something really worth while. I'd like to play at the Queen's Hall—the Albert Hall. You can, if you're good. Other people do it. Why—" she asked a little frantically, trying to draw a response from the closed face above her—"shouldn't I become famous like Myra Hess? Or Nellie Melba? Why do we always have to stay in a rut?"

"Madame Melba is a singer," said Mrs. Orwin practically. The poor child, she thought, might have done well enough if God had given her a voice, but He had endowed her with a broad bosom and long neck, and that was all.

"I know that. You always go off on a tangent, Mother, when we try to explain anything seriously to you." Winifred put the racquet down on the basket of twigs and leant forward. Her chestnut plaits, weighted with fashionable butterfly bows, swung over her shoulders and framed her blunt features in a horseshoe of bright mahogany. She tossed them back impatiently and said: "Anyone would think you didn't want us to get on in the world. And you do really. I don't want to be just somebody's wife and housekeeper like Dorothy does. I feel I could be important on my own account." She slipped her thumbs into her belt and gave her tennis skirt a defiant hitch.

Over the flashing knitting-needles, Mrs. Orwin remarked:

"We don't have to decide anything just yet. You're staying at school another year, and you can go on practising your piano as much as you like. Your father doesn't mind."

"Father's the trouble." Winifred raised her head, and listened to the metallic progress of the mower as it jerked forward under her father's ungentle hands. As she listened, the blood, whipped up in her cheeks from her jumps round the tennis court, receded a little. Her face sharpened, and her eyes, which in moments of enthusiasm glowed blue, paled, so that her mother felt, watching her, a withdrawal of her total personality in upon herself. Outwardly passive, she sat there with calm, clasped hands, and even smiled, looking toward the open window, where the scent of newly-cut grass mingled with the scent of the lavender hedge and overpowered the pricking summery smells of churchyard and garden. "Father," said Winifred in a cool, amused voice, "doesn't think I'm capable of doing anything."

"That's not true, my dear." The extra touch of severity on the knitting-needles was enough to keep the sock wagging, but under the corrugated fringe Mrs. Orwin lifted expressionless eyes to her daughter's averted face. "We all think you have quite a considerable talent. And look how splendidly you played at the school concert. Your father was very impressed when Miss Martineau mentioned it to him."

"But he didn't do anything about it," argued Winifred. "Miss Martineau told him I was good enough to take up music professionally. She didn't mean just *teaching*."

"Well, we don't know what she meant," said Mrs. Orwin carefully. "As a matter of fact, I don't think your father has decided yet *what* to train you for."

"Well, it isn't fair." Winifred stared at her mother accusingly. "Antony's four years younger than I am, and Father's sending him to Oxford. And Dorothy's to do domestic science." She got up and strolled across to the french window. In the middle of the lawn the rector was standing still, his shoulders hunched over the mower and the back of one heavily-veined hand pressed against his brows. Only by a flicker of the lids did he acknowledge the gleam of Winifred's

white frock and the probable presence of his wife in the darkness behind her. 'Father's shamming tired,' thought Winifred, and said aloud: "Look, Mother. If I speak to Father, he'll have a hundred and one arguments to bring against me. I want *you* to speak to him."

Mrs. Orwin threw a glance of complete understanding at her daughter's despondent back. Winifred was holding the bobble of the curtain cord in one hand, and with the other picking at the gilt threads that were woven into the shining blue-grey silk. Her shadow blocked the beam of sunlight that filtered through the lilacs beyond the churchyard. Mrs. Orwin sighed. "All right, Winifred. I'll have a talk with your father. But mind, I can't promise anything. You know," said Mrs. Orwin, beginning to wind up her wool and looking round for her knitting bag, "what your father is like as well as I do. He's a great believer in security. He thinks music is very precarious. And so, for that matter, do I. Now be careful—" for Winifred was across the room and hugging her mother with wordless, passionate gratitude—"of my knitting for goodness' sake. It won't help your chances at all if you ruin his socks just as I was about to tell him they were ready for him."

"But you will help me, Mother!" exulted Winifred. "Oh, I knew you would." She lifted ecstatic eyes, deeply blue, to her mother's face, and did not notice the melancholy that had scored thin wrinkles round her mother's smiling lips. . . .

The rector thought his younger daughter might as well 'do' music as anything else. She showed no other talents and he was disappointed that she was not interested in the running of the house or parish—spheres, one might have expected, where any number of women could find plenty to do. Mrs. Orwin, however, pointed out that there were already two capable women in charge of his household, and it was not to be expected that Winifred could play permanent second fiddle to a mother and an older sister. To this the rector agreed, adding that, of his three children, only Dorothy seemed to have inherited his aptitude for practical affairs. Antony was dreamy and stubborn by turns: he could not imagine whatever would become of him in the future. And as for Winifred, he

could not make her out at all. She had a will of her own, judging by her hysterical outbreaks of temper, but her abilities were shockingly mediocre. He certainly did not wish to stand in the child's light if there were anything she felt reasonably certain she could do. Her mixed Celtic and Danish blood might well give her some artistic talent, musical or otherwise. They had better, he said, consult Miss Ledbury, and if she thought well of the project, Winifred should go to London and study under a first-class teacher. He forbore to remark that he had no confidence whatever in Miss Ledbury's judgment, but had been considerably impressed by the unsolicited praise of Winifred's pianoforte-playing by Miss Martineau.

Miss Ledbury, as it turned out, was overjoyed when the rector proposed she should pass on her pupil to one of the best teachers in London. Miss Ledbury had a high opinion of Winifred's tenacity and ambition. She herself was a mediocre teacher, and none of her pupils had so far distinguished themselves or brought her any of the credit she would have liked. She was a little doubtful about the quality of Winifred's musical talent, but she was a very great believer in 'character': if you had 'character', she used to say, you could get anywhere, do anything; provided, that is, you were not altogether lacking in aptitude. That Miss Ledbury herself was still quite an insignificant person proved nothing. She saw herself readily as the midwife to genius, and it was obvious she could do very little until she found a genius to work with. If pressed to say whether she considered Winifred as gifted as all that, she would have hedged a little, and said you really, at this stage, could hardly tell. But certainly the child now needed a better teacher than herself. (She had a quite humble and realistic view of her own capacities.)

But it was Miss Martineau, Winifred's headmistress, who was really responsible for making up Miss Ledbury's mind about Winifred. If the great Miss Martineau thought so well of Winifred's promise, who in the world was Miss Ledbury to object? Thus painfully did the Miss Ledburys of the century's first decades acknowledge the dazzling superiority of academically qualified women. Besides, and this settled the matter for

Miss Ledbury's conscience, Winifred had 'character'. 'In ^{her} ambition she was even—though one would deprecate making such an extreme criticism of dear little Winifred—a thought formidable. But God, Miss Ledbury hastened to remind herself, helped those who help themselves.

The rest was easy. Miss Ledbury had contacts in London with the contemporary musical world. She was an early admirer of Cecil Sharp, knew by reputation the staff of the Academy and the Royal College, and was a tireless member of 'groups' for the popularisation of folk-dancing, choral singing, and musical education of school children. Her knowledge of the great ones was, it is true, at second-hand and by hearsay. But this did not prevent her from informing the rector that she knew just the teacher for Winifred. A friend of a friend of hers had a cousin whose daughter had been 'brought out' at the Aeolian Hall by a famous organist and teacher, who regularly gave recitals at the Queen's Hall and was a composer of some merit. If this man—Stewart Lockwood his name was—could be persuaded to take Winifred as a pupil, her future would be made. If he refused to take her, then it might be just as well to abandon the idea of making Winifred a celebrity. Miss Ledbury suggested that she should coach Winifred for just six months more, and at the end of that time an audition with Stewart Lockwood should be sought. In the meanwhile, Winifred might slacken a little on her school work and spend every available minute at the piano, perfecting her technique. For it was undeniable that she had a lot to learn.

XIII

EVERY TUESDAY morning, between ten a.m. and noon, Winifred attended at the Child Guidance Clinic, which was housed temporarily in a disused room of the Town Hall. Opaque glass sheltered her from inquisitive eyes across the

well of the building. On the morning following Maisie's visit to Harley Street, Mrs. Mainwaring, breathing heavily from her walk up the stone staircase, presented her blotched and puffy face in the subdued light to Winifred, and twitched her magenta scarf into a pouch below the pale folds of her throat. Her ill-fitting costume was shiny and frayed on the under-arm. Her anxious eyes, incongruous with the fleshy setting and the toothpaste smile, never left Winifred's face. The little girl, Angela, waited outside until her mother should have finished talking with the doctor.

Calm and courteous, Winifred continued to jot down Mrs. Mainwaring's answers to her questions about Angela's progress. She was paler than ever after working late the evening before, but to Mrs. Mainwaring she was 'every inch the lady'. Looking damn smart too in a green Harris tweed. Mrs. Mainwaring's cheeks puckered with discontent. It was all right to be some people. Some people had money to burn.

"And how has Angela been behaving to *you*?" asked Winifred finally. Her frank air of you-and-I-are-working-together-on-this-case was flattering to bewildered parents. The interview took on a conspiratorial air. Mrs. Mainwaring stopped fidgeting with the clasp of her handbag and relaxed.

"Well, there, doctor, I must admit she hasn't been such a trial this week. But she's still a very naughty child—— selfish, I call her. Very like her father——" Mrs. Mainwaring sighed.

"I know," said Winifred sympathetically. "You have such a lot to put up with." She consulted her notes. "But I have a piece of good news for you. Miss Lawrence says she's much quieter at school. And she doesn't worry the other children so much. I met Miss Lawrence last night."

Mrs. Mainwaring was doubtful. "Wish I could say the same of home. You know, doctor——" Her face had the petulant creases of a worried doll. "She's so awfully greedy. I slave to cook her good, nourishing meals. And how I do it on the rations, Heaven only knows——" Self-pity forced a rising note of indignation in her voice. "But she pecks at everything. Then, after the meal's all over, she goes foraging in the larder for cheese and fruit and cakes. Cheese especially.

It makes her father wild. He doesn't think she should eat the cheese ration for the whole family. And of course she's always asking for sweets. You can't do it on the coupons——"

Winifred let this slide. "Is she still as destructive with her dolls?"

"Well, she's not so bad. Though she *would* shave all the fur off the new teddy bear she got for her birthday just as soon as she got him. Quite spoilt it, she did. And when I went on at her for being destructive, she tipped the red ink on to the carpet. I could have sworn she did it on purpose. She's far too old at eight to be so destructive, to my way of thinking."

"Couldn't you let her play more in the garden?" Winifred suggested. "It's lovely weather just now."

"There again," said Mrs. Mainwaring indignantly. "She's not content just to *play*, as you might say. I put her doll's pram out there, and she's got a tricycle. But no. She must be mucking about with water, and then she takes her shoes off and stands in the wet mud. She gets filthy, and I have the fun of washing all her clothes——"

"Well now——" Winifred considered this. "It's certainly too much extra work for you on top of all your housework. But why not give her a zinc bath out in the garden, and let her fill it with a jug from the kitchen tap?" She glanced sidelong at Mrs. Mainwaring and smiled. "A *small* jug, of course, so that it takes her a long time. And if you could get her a watering can as well—— With a spout——?"

Mrs. Mainwaring shrugged her shoulders. "They're hard to get in the shops. And anyway, she'd still mess up her clothes. I do try to keep her nice. Like other people's children——"

"She always looks charming," cut in Winifred quickly. "And so intelligent. . . ." Though Angela's untidy clothes and straggling hair had been Maisie's theme-song on the previous evening as she drove with Winifred from Chelsea to Kensington. "Still, Angela ought to have her mud-pies at present," said Winifred. The Mainwarings were hard up, she knew. "Could you not give her a little play-suit, or something that doesn't matter? And keep her nice clothes for when she goes out with you?"

Well—I might.” To Mrs. Mainwaring, however, it sounded very much like hard work. “There *are* limits to what one pair of hands can do.”

“Yes, I quite see that.” Winifred was respectful. “You mothers are doing the hardest job of work in the country just now. • You should be very proud.”

“As to that——” Mrs. Mainwaring grimaced. “We haven’t much choice, have we? We’re never satisfied till we got a man of our own, and when we got him, we wish we hadn’t.” ‘Though I bet *you’re* all right,’ she told herself resentfully, and wondered what sort of a husband a lady like Dr. Orwin would marry. She doesn’t wear a wedding-ring, reflected Mrs. Mainwaring, but that wouldn’t signify. Not with these clever ones who go in for professions. Wonder why she does it. Funny way to live, always working. Not *my* idea of fun. . . . Bet she’s making a packet, though. Perhaps that’s the reason. . . .

“By the way,” said Winifred softly. “How are you and your husband getting on these days? Are things any easier between you?”

Mrs. Mainwaring’s pouchy face went a dull red. She pulled out her gloves and began to draw them on preparing for departure. She had always considered it undignified to let her hair down to another woman. “He doesn’t break his heart on my account,” she said finally, with reluctance. “But I do think he’s getting more patient with Angela.”

Very delicately, Winifred approached the question. “He still sees that woman in his office?”

“As far as *I* know,” said his wife sourly, “and I don’t know much.”

“You resent that, of course?”

“Well, wouldn’t anybody?” retorted Mrs. Mainwaring. “He owes me something, doesn’t he? I get the whole responsibility of the child,” she said indignantly. “It’s his child too, isn’t it? You’d think he’d had nothing to do with it. He’s so damned stuck-up, he thinks he’s too good for us. Well, handsome is as handsome does.” A fine moral wrath underlined the cliché. “At least I don’t go gallivanting about with other chaps. I keep respectable and Angela’s being brought up like

a lady. She'd be a poor little creature if she was left to ^hh. For all his fine-gentleman ways."

Winifred had met Mr. Mainwaring. Privately she considered it something of a miracle that he still nominally resided under the same roof as his wife. Sensitive and sometimes cruel, he was at least five years younger than she, and fastidious in a rather feline, self-conscious way. If there was no rose in all the world until Mrs. Mainwaring came, he was certainly disenchanted with roses now. Especially with the puffed blossom that Mrs. Mainwaring presented in middle age. Only convention, an anxious temperament averse to change, and a faint stir of conscience for Angela prevented him from leaving the domestic roof for good.

"I think, though——" Winifred spoke as one who had made an important discovery. "Your husband will be very proud of Angela when she's a charming young girl—in her 'teens. His type always is. She's very like her father, don't you think? In temperament—— But in other ways, of course, much more like you. Pretty. And lots of common sense."

Mrs. Mainwaring gazed at Winifred with dog-like eyes, dumbfounded both by Winifred's perspicacity and by her superhuman cleverness, which could foretell what the incomprehensible Mr. Mainwaring would do. She patted her suède gloves with dawning complacency. "Yes, Angela's not too bad, taking everything all round, as you might say." She went on in a sudden burst of gratitude. "It's wonderful the way she's cottoned on to you, doctor. She's much more biddable. Honestly, I'd never have believed it, not if the Archangel Gabriel himself had come and told me so. Not six months ago, I wouldn't. When I think what a little devil she was when I first brought her. Not that she hasn't a long way to go yet. Still, she's not too bad, taking everything all round. . . ."

But the elfn, white-faced child who tumbled into Winifred's arms a few minutes later was an obvious nobody's darling. Her brilliant blue eyes flashed over the bare and flowerless clinic, seeing indeed very little. She moved roughly, letting her weight drag, and hurting Winifred's arm as she swung round. Then bounced on the sofa, and laughed boisterously as she felt

the springs give beneath her. Fine brows arched over her clear, intelligent eyes. Her Greek nose, the pure line from ear to jaw, and the delicate, sculptured mouth spoke of generations of noble and disinterested living. Between this basic refinement and her uncouth gesticulations the contrast was startling.

"Hallo!" said Winifred softly. She sat down on the sofa beside Angela and put an arm round the child's waist, drawing her gently on to her knee. The small head burrowed for a moment into Winifred's tweed jacket. Sniffing like a young animal, Angela pulled at the bow of Winifred's blouse. The silk ends slipped apart and fell softly down over the lapels. Angela laughed, and reached up to Winifred's hair a thin and predatory hand.

Winifred's eyebrows went up in mock alarm. "Do you want to pull my hair down?" she asked indulgently. She was still smiling.

"Yes. I do," chattered Angela excitedly. "I do it to Mummy, and she gets angry with me. Now I want to do it to you." Jerking herself off Winifred's lap, she attacked the plump coil of russet hair on Winifred's neck. Hairpins sprang out in all directions.

"Well——" Winifred appeared to consider, sitting quite still while she made a few helpful suggestions. "Let me see. If you start on this side and look for the hairpins first—— See, I'll pull one out for you to begin with. There—— If you get them all out like that, you'll find my hair will fall on to my shoulders just like yours."

Skiping from one foot to the other, Angela pulled happily. A flush warmed her pale cheeks. She wore a kilted cotton frock which gave her complete freedom of movement, but even the constriction of shoes and socks irked her, for she sat down suddenly and worked them off. Then she jumped up and finished with Winifred. They faced each other, hair tumbled loosely on their shoulders, and laughed at their likeness.

"Now we're much more comfortable," remarked Winifred, leaning back against the shiny green wall behind the sofa.

"Can I have the plasticene?" There were bookshelves along

one wall, hidden by a cretonne curtain. Angela pointed to one of the shelves. "I know where you keep it."

"So you do," said Winifred. "I wonder if you could be clever enough to find the right box straight away?"

The child was across the room in a flash. "*This* one." She dumped the box on Winifred's knee, and began to work at the cardboard lid with her finger-nails. Lumps of plasticene, streaked yellow and red and blue and green, were tossed impatiently on to the lino floor. "Haven't you got a blue stick?" With the desire to please Winifred, her eyes began to shine. "I'll make you my blue bird. Miss Lawrence said my blue bird was the best of anybody's in dinner-break. Would you like it?"

"Oh yes, I heard about your blue bird," said Winifred mysteriously. "Miss Lawrence told me. And all the other exciting things you've made at school. Yes. I'd very much like to see it."

Angela sat on the floor at Winifred's feet, modelling busily. With fantastically arched wings and narrow, high feet, the bird took shape under her hurrying, nervous fingers. In repose her face had the angelic sadness of an Italian primitive. The long lashes swept her cheek. The wide kilt flowed round her feet. But her eyes were avid for approval as she looked up and placed the blue bird upright on Winifred's palm. She jumped up, scattering bits of plasticene on the floor, and treading them into multi-whorled discs. Carefully not seeing these, Winifred praised the bird warmly.

"I'm so glad you're liking school better now," she remarked, stroking the arched wings. "Aren't you glad you didn't leave and stay at home for good?"

Angela's expression darkened. "No. I hate it really. I don't *want* to go. I'll never really *like* it. You see, I hate the children."

"But not *all* the children," Winifred suggested.

Grudgingly Angela admitted: "No, not *all*. I hate the boys, though. They pull my hair and punch me. They're beasts. Why don't you tell Mummy not to let me go?"

"I think you'd be lonely at home with no one to play with

except Mummy," said Winifred, looking wise. "And as for the boys, well, it's really only Matthew, isn't it? And every time you come and see me, you can tell me about Matthew."

"Well, I shall just tell you I hate him."

"Look," said Winifred briskly. "I want you to do some drawings for me before you go and fetch your mother." She produced a green pencil from her handbag. A gold and green tassel dangled from the end. It was one Maisie had given her. "You can draw it with this special pencil I've bought for you, and when you go home you can take it with you if you like." She laid out a fresh pad of paper on the desk.

Angela sat down at the desk, biting her tongue firmly in her cheek. She loved drawing, and in a few minutes had covered the sheet with grotesque bodies and pointed heads with enormous teeth. Winifred watched her, then made a few notes in her case-book. Presently the child stopped.

"Are those Mummy and Daddy?" asked Winifred casually, pointing to a male and female monster attacking each other with spears.

Angela blushed and covered them with her hand.

"I think they're quite good," said Winifred calmly. "It's quite interesting, the things you draw."

"Mummy'd be wild," boasted Angela, looking up to see whether she had managed to shock Dr. Orwin.

"Would she?" Winifred appeared to consider. "But I think Mummy is proud that you can draw."

"Not this," mumbled Angela, deflated. "Mummy gets in awful tempers with me. Sometimes she smacks me like anything. And I never know what I've done." She stared at Winifred to see the effects of these words.

"Boo-hoo-hoo," said Winifred comically, compelling Angela to laugh. "Now draw me some more." She stared in pleased expectancy at the empty sheet on the desk.

"All right," said Angela, and drew a labyrinth of lines representing corridors, stairs, precipices and pits. Biting feverishly at her tongue, she filled these narrow spaces with tiny figures, leaping and falling, fighting and climbing, threatening one another and injuring one another with teeth, claws and horns.

"They're very savage, aren't they?" said Winifred interestedly. "Do you ever dream of things like these at night?"

Angela said a little breathlessly: "Yes. I have horrible dreams, and I get so frightened." The memory drained the colour from her thin face, leaving it pinched and old.

"Could you draw me some of your dreams?" Winifred suggested.

Angela took a fresh page and drew a deep, smooth-sided pit. Falling sheer into its depths, without any jutting brick or loose stone to break the horror of the fall, there was a tiny, plunging figure without limbs. It was going straight down into the middle of the pit, headlong. "That's what I dream," said Angela, and her terrified eyes glittered. Then the pencil wavered. Angela put her head down on her thin arms and began to sob. The tears wrinkled her drawing. Suddenly she flung herself round and held Winifred convulsively by the arms.

"Don't let me fall, doc." She shook Winifred in her vehemence. "Hold me tight. I'm so frightened." Her voice rose to a scream. "Don't let me fall."

"I won't let you fall," said Winifred cheerfully, and lifted the slight, sobbing figure up to her knee. It was a good moment for Winifred. This was the very first time that Angela had allowed herself to be fondled. Always when Winifred slipped an arm around her before, she pulled herself away like a wild thing, suspicious of human handling. But now she was crying and clinging to Winifred, like any normal, broken-hearted child who needed petting and reassurance. 'I never fail to get results with children,' thought Winifred, and what could be more rewarding?

And she thought: Parents hardly ever know how to handle their own children. Two or three children at the most, and even then they make a ruin of them—— ruin them for life. But I've saved hundreds. How better could one adjust to the mistakes and disasters of one's own childhood, which are beyond recall anyway? . . . Winifred sat very still, nursing Angela, and waiting for the attack of sobbing to quieten down. Angela's tears felt hot through the silk of her blouse.

FOR THE tenderness, Winifred thought, that one gives to a hurt and unwanted child makes up for something. One needed it so, badly oneself, and there was nobody with the capacity to give it, or even to see how lonely and inferior the middle child of the family could feel, when there was an older sister who had all the graces and the good looks, and a younger brother who had all the brains. Being the ugly duckling of the family was a good joke when told against someone else and a personal tragedy when lived by oneself. Only Mrs. Orwin had some faint inkling how Winifred had felt, growing up between Dorothy and Antony. And even Mrs. Orwin was on the 'other side'. Her insight bore fruit in sudden interventions and spontaneous acts of kindness, but she never managed to hide her fundamental conviction that poor little Winifred was the also-ran of the family. For Dorothy was slender and dainty like her mother and had her mother's charming sympathy of expression, and Antony inherited their father's intelligence, together with his stormy temper and his maddening obstinacy. The red-haired Winifred, they said, laughing at the incalculableness of things, was some sort of a throw-back; was a waif and stray. . . .

Winifred was indeed handicapped by her looks in those days. A heavy, unhandy child, with a long body and legs short in proportion, like a dachshund. Very powerfully built, though—unfeminine, with thick calves and ankles. Beside the slender, long-legged Dorothy, Winifred felt like a monstrosity. Dorothy, of course, had curls. She *would* have curls, and, equally of course, they were silky and flax-coloured. Charm, curls, an Elizabethan-lyrical complexion, and a shrill and pleasant voice to sing hymns with. They—the mysterious 'they' who dispense the good gifts at their caprice, mocking at justice—had endowed the elder sister with these fairy gifts at birth. Whimsicality, or a perverted desire to restore the mean, stayed their hand when Winifred, very much the second child, appeared a year later.

By the age of seven, Winifred was accustomed to seeing an expression wiped off people's faces as their gaze shifted from Dorothy towards herself. The idiotic, melting admiration of grown-up people for her sister's wax-doll charm was a part of experience to which she grew accustomed though not resigned. She would meet her nurse's eyes, in the mirror, while her own mop of wiry ginger hair was getting its hundred strokes of the brush, and a scowl would gather as she waited for Nana to trot out the invariable, well-meant encouragement. "Never mind, my dear, I always say a head of hair looks nice if only it's brushed regularly. And when you're older you can have it curled with the irons. You'd suit curls, I think."

By the age of seven, Winifred had realised that the most dignified reply to this was silence. But occasionally her feeling was too much for her dignity. "I *like* straight hair myself. I wouldn't have Dorothy's silly curls for anything. Rotten lot of tangles I call it. . . ." Or more sulkily: "Irons burn your hair and make it like tow. Sarah said so." (Sarah was the maid of the moment.) Chidden for biting her nails, her hand smarting from a well-deserved smack, her throat sore from screaming, and her eyes aching with angry tears, she found an occasional ally in Sarah, who would lift her hot face from the sink, fold her immense arms akimbo, and confront Nana with an unexpected, vague, large tolerance. "Oh, let the child alone, can't you? She'll mend her manners if she's not for ever and a day picked at." But Sarah was unreliable, and as often an enemy as a friend.

Dreamy or morose by turns, the Winifred of those days was completely happy in only one relationship: with her young brother Antony. Sheltered by her protective indifference from her mother's placid pride in Dorothy and her father's dark and explosive rages, she turned to Antony as she would have turned to any young and lovable thing that happened to be around. A pet puppy would have done as well.

Antony, however, was more fun than a puppy, while having the puppy's single-track devotion. At four, he was a sedate child, small and neat for his age, with a warm pallor, and a thatch of glossy, red hair, worn rather long like his father's.

He was considered 'interesting', in the rather unpredictable Celtic way. It was not for nothing that their father came from a long line of Moray fishermen. Tenacity, a sense of humour that could be brutal, and an underlying fatalistic melancholy were already stamped on his features. Innocent, apparently self-contained, but readily reduced to tears of unconsolable grief, Antony reached out to Winifred for support when the rising tension of the family broke over the children's heads. The Rev. Theodore Orwin, who, morning after morning, rose at five a.m. to meditate on some passage in Thomas Aquinas or Marcus Aurelius, and never scamped the early morning services in the dawn-lit church at the end of the garden, was, alas, all too human when he sat down to bacon and eggs with his wife and children at the breakfast table. Paternal arrogance, powerfully reinforced by asceticism, worked like a ferment in his imagination. He saw his children as damned souls, swinging between heaven and hell, and dependent on him to save them from the eternal fires. "Why don't you hold your spoon properly?" he would yell at Antony, who was carefully finishing off his milk after swallowing with reluctance a disgusting slab of porridge. Or: "Sit up straight, Winifred. I won't have children lolling all over the place at table and showing disrespect to your mother and myself." Errors of deportment were equated in his mind with the greater moral lapses. All led the same way down the primrose path to the bonfire.

Dorothy was seldom reprimanded. Her golden curls had a knack of looking always tidy, and she could roll her blue eyes at the Rev. Theodore with a confiding admiration that sickened Winifred and Antony. The neutrality of Mrs. Orwin threw the issue to the children to decide for themselves. Winifred and Antony were allies in the battle of the family set-up. . . .

So that that frightful Sunday evening, nearly half a century ago, when she left Antony to suffer the punishment which her own violence had provoked, still fretted in Winifred's memory like an act that one would gladly undo, and that could never be undone.

It was a hot, still evening of late summer in the year 1900. In the rectory garden a spectrum of violent colour—the

intense red of peony, the burning yellow of marigold, the piercing blue of delphinium—bordered the gravelled path that led to the private gate of the churchyard. Beyond the warm grey of the flaking tombstones, the immense pile of the church blocked the glittering particles of the mauve-misty, benign summer sky. The yellow fields around the village were motionless except for a slight quiver of heat.

Passing through the church door to evening service behind her mother and Dorothy, Winifred dropped Antony's hand, and blinked in the sudden, cool darkness. The chancel was hidden behind pillars of great size, for the church was built when the village was an important market town, and could have seated many times its present congregation. As they passed up the middle aisle to the rectory pew near the front, the wooden roses of the choir stalls, the gilt eagle meekly bent beneath the lectern, and the tasselled, crimson altar cloth focused themselves for Winifred to compose a familiar pattern. Church services bored her, but she was always obscurely soothed by the contrast between the impersonal austerity of the building itself and the gaiety and colour of everything used in it. The early masons had built into these lofty pillars supporting the far-off roof, with its intricate floral carvings lost in shadow, their own sense of awe. But when the eye dropped to pew level, there was a strip of bright blue carpet leading to the altar, and here her father padded noiselessly between stall and lectern, altar and pulpit, while his white cassock gleamed with starch and his hood of rich blue and ebony hung like the folded wings of a familiar raven. On the altar a few lilies, stiff in gilt vases, lifted golden tongues to the glory of God. And above, in the lemony stained-glass windows, mild-eyed saints fixed their thoughts on bliss, and dragons coiled themselves into a narrow space to keep within the picture.

Mrs. Orwin sat between Winifred and Antony. Dorothy walked on past them up to the top of the aisle, mounted the blue steps to the chancel, and sat down in the nearest choir stall, her skirt of broderie Anglaise rayed round her like daisy petals. Very pink beneath her leghorn hat with its garland of

daisies, she appeared to be studying with diligence the gilt edges of her hymn book. The pale curls fell softly across her cheeks. There was a stir of interest in the surrounding pews and a few whispered comments from the villagers. Peering round carefully, because her mother's eyes were all round her head, Winifred caught the half-smiles of approval on the red faces of Mr. Ellbetter from the Hall Farm and Mr. Apps from the general store. Miss Bland, who kept the Post Office, was reserving judgment, but her bleak and wintry expression had noticeably thawed. Sitting up there in her white frock, touched by the glow of light from the rose window in the west wall, Dorothy was not unconscious of the charming picture she presented. But she behaved very well. It was the first time she had sat with the choir, and she was to sing the solo anthem in her unimpassioned, childish treble. 'The King of Love My Shepherd Is'. Winifred knew the words by heart, having been forced to listen to Dorothy practising them for over a fortnight. There was a picture of the Good Shepherd in pastels over the head of Winifred's bed. She felt she would never be able to abide the sight of it again. . . .

When the time came for Dorothy to sing, a stir of excitement rippled through the somnolent congregation. Some of the choir boys stretched their necks to turn and stare at Dorothy. The Rev. Theodore frowned. Mrs. Orwin's agitation fluttered the laces of her high-bosomed, Edwardian dress. And the villagers sat up in varying attitudes of critical attention. But Dorothy, childishly unconcerned, noticed nothing. She had been taught to give the words of the hymn their full value, and when she began to sing she forgot the audience.

The King of Love my Shepherd is,
His goodness faileth never.
I nothing lack if I am His,
And He is mine for ever.

Her voice, a pure, unselfconscious treble, fell into the silence of the old church and was transformed, perhaps by its age and the memories of a score of generations that gathered to touch

the heart, into something ageless and sexless. As if, not Dorothy, but the voice of humanity sang: confident and joyous on its pilgrimage, and innocent with the innocence of unravaged faith.

Where streams of living water flow
My ransomed soul He leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth.

The gentle cadences, floating over the muted notes of the organ, trembled on the dusty air, and Winifred scowled. It sounded all right now, but Dorothy had got into difficulties with this verse at home, and what did 'ransomed' and 'verdant' mean anyway? Dorothy, she was sure, had no idea. They were only words to be trotted out on Sundays along with the daisy-garlanded hat and the white buttoned boots.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed. . . .

Winifred's attention strayed too. She wanted to pull at her mother's sleeve and tell her to look round at the gaping, stupid faces all turned one way. To distract her from Dorothy's grave, childish figure up there in the chancel. To make her look back at the sunset, broken up into golden lozenges by the rose window in the west wall. Antony, she could see, was not interested. It was past his bedtime, and he was probably hoping there would be jelly for supper. Some tiresome people had been invited and would probably discuss Dorothy sickeningly over the supper table. She kicked out her feet in their hard Sunday boots, and wished her Kate Greenaway bonnet did not scratch her ears. She detested the Kate Greenaway outfit, and wished she were in her old overall, climbing the apple trees at the bottom of the orchard. Mrs. Orwin nudged her repressively and she tucked her white boots under the pew.

And so through all the length of days. . . .

Oh, that line was true, she thought passionately: life was unbearably long, and Sundays were the longest part of it. . . . There was the blue carpet, and her father in his cassock padding between the stall and the altar, and the immovable crimson tassels of the altar cloth, and her mother, gigantic and majestic, but squeezed up in the pew beside her. They were part of the order of things that could never be changed, and Dorothy was part of the order. The hymn soared to its triumphant conclusion.

Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise
Within Thy house for ever.

"No, God," whispered Winifred in panic. "Don't let it be for ever. I couldn't bear it . . . I couldn't bear it . . . I couldn't bear it. . . ."

And God was merciful. The service ended at last.

"Come, children," said Mrs. Orwin, and thankfully gathered her books together, and smoothed her long, kid gloves. Dorothy joined them as they filed out of the pew. Winifred dragged in the rear. As her mother's striped skirt billowed through the west porch, the farmers' wives swarmed round them, and polite buzzes shattered the evening quietness. "Very nice, I must say. . . . She sings real well, ought to do it again some time. . . . Dessay you'll be having her voice trained one of these fine days, dear me, how they do grow up to be sure, no mistake. . . ." Her mother's floral hat, skewered high on the wire frame that supported her front ringlets, bobbed acknowledgments right and left. The spotted veil fluttered complacently as, with Dorothy demure at her side, she made her way slowly through the groups of two or three who liked lingering after evensong for a chat. At the gate she was joined by Mrs. and Miss Coombsbury, gentlefolk and church workers, who were invited to the rectory for supper.

As the chorus of adulation began all over again, Winifred slipped away and entered the rectory by the french windows from the veranda. Her eye caught a smudge of pink, half hidden by the chaise-longue where her mother took a necessary

nap after Sunday dinners. 'Looks like Dorothy's wax doll,' Winifred told herself exultantly; 'Mother ought to be cross with her for not putting it in its proper place.' She looked back hopefully, but Mrs. Orwin was leading the way to the front porch round the angle of the house. With bent head she was giving all her attention to Mrs. Coombsbury's throaty exclamations. She could not possibly see the doll from there. Decidedly it was Dorothy's lucky day.

"A most charming performance," declared Mrs. Coombsbury at supper. Her upholstered bosom, supporting the spread of several double chins, veered impressively between the Rev. Theodore on her left and his wife at the far end of the table. The talk floated above the children's heads like the remote and uncontradictable fiat of an oracle.

"Most delightful and unaffected," echoed her daughter. It was obvious to Winifred she had very fine taste, because she minced her ham so small and lifted it to her mouth with all her fingers cocked as far as possible from the fork. She had a long, mournful face and took charge of the urns at missionary teas.

The Rev. Theodore hoped that so much approval would not turn his children's heads. "Dorothy was well enough—well enough," he conceded. He helped himself to salad and looked sternly at his brood, who were sitting meekly before plates of bread and butter and mugs of milk. His glance softened as it passed over Dorothy's downswept curls. Dorothy, he hoped, was not listening.

"Oh, more than that surely. I would go further than that," pronounced Mrs. Coombsbury, with an alarming swing of the bosom in his direction. "My husband had very great understanding of music. He was quite a connoisseur in his way. A military way, you understand——" She paused while a murmur of regret for the military dead rippled round the table. "He was always so happy when his duties gave him the opportunity to hear some really good music. But unfortunately——" She exhaled deeply and gazed at the branched silver vase of sweet peas springing from a lace mat in the centre of the table, "we were often so far from centres of

civilisation and culture. However," she added, vigorously crumbling bread with one plump hand, "I still keep up my interest in music. One cannot allow one's private griefs to shut one off from the good things of life. That's why I am so glad our little Dorothy here is showing an early talent for music. She is indeed fortunate."

Mrs. Orwin acknowledged this speech with the graciousness it deserved. She was a little pale after the exacting routine of Sunday, and was wondering if she could serve the children's pudding at once and call Sarah to put them to bed. Antony's eyes were almost closed, but she knew he would refuse to leave the table without a helping of the decorated green jelly on the sideboard. Winifred was sitting in a lump, frowning at her milk and with the tight mouth that usually preceded a tantrum. Mrs. Orwin twitched the ruffles at her throat and wondered how long it would be before she could escape upstairs and unhook her tight taffeta bodice. She reflected that in many ways Winifred was very like her father.

Winifred did not immediately follow Sarah up to the bedroom after supper. She waited till Dorothy's white button boots and velvet sash had disappeared along the first floor passage. Biting her nails furiously, she stared down at her own boots. They were as good as Dorothy's, but somehow they never looked just right at the end of her own legs. A picture of Dorothy, blonde and shapely, framed by the evening light that streamed through the gold west window, stared at her clearly with what seemed like derision. Winifred winced afresh as she remembered the approval of the congregation. She wriggled impatiently in her Kate Greenaway dress. She was sure it did not suit her. She felt like a barrel on stilts.

Suddenly Winifred knew what to do. Turning away from the staircase, she crept along the stone passage that led from the main hall to the kitchens at the back of the house. Here the floor was stone-flagged, but there was no one to hear her as she crept by on tiptoe. And soon she was out on the concrete path that led past the kitchen door to the dustbins, and on to where the water-butt stood at the angle of the kitchen and drawing-room walls. She had only a few feet now

to go to reach the french windows, which still stood open from the drawing-room. The chaise-longue was there as her mother had left it, its striped cushion bunched and scattered. And under the chaise-longue Dorothy's pink wax doll still sprawled in a ridiculous attitude. Winifred gazed at the doll with terror. She knew now just exactly what it was she had to do. With a last, scared look round, she picked up the doll and banged it with all her strength against the stone floor. . . . Banged it again. . . . And again. . . .

When it was all over, she was conscious of a shadow across the veranda. Her head flashed up, and there was Antony standing beside her—a quivering question-mark of horror and shock. Together they stared at the heap of crushed pink fragments that had once been a doll—that is to say, a personality in the Orwin nursery—a genuine focus of piety and devotion. The enormity of her wickedness smote Winifred then, as much because of Antony's dumb incomprehension as from the gradual subsiding of her own black rage. There the pieces lay—bits of wax and shreds of muslin—Dorothy's doll. It was smashed. Smashed irretrievably. And Winifred was the murderess. A sob rose in her throat, and she fled from Antony: back through the kitchens and up to her bedroom, and flung herself face downwards on her own bed. She abandoned herself to grief.

Left to himself, Antony, however, noticed something. The doll could open and shut its eyes and he had always wondered how. The mechanism that moved the eyes now lay at his feet. He knelt down and picked up a stout wire shaped like a wish-bone, with the eyeballs stuck on at the end like the stalked eyes of a crab. He was too surprised by this to hear the sound of feet approaching. The Rev. Theodore, in search of a book on early Christian ritual to quote to Mrs. Coombsbury, emerged through the folding doors between dining and drawing rooms, and caught sight of his son kneeling on the veranda outside. He strode wrathfully towards the french window, and was just about to shout: "Why aren't you in bed?" when he saw what Antony was doing. Antony had in the past made a number of enquiries about the eyes and how they worked. Seeing him

now with the abominable things in his hand, his father could only come to one conclusion. He came to it with a roar that reverberated through the house. Seizing the unfortunate Antony by the collar, he shook him into speechlessness, and dragged him, stammering and weeping, upstairs to the study. The place of punishment and prayer.

It was not the first time Antony had had a beating. His father kept a cane in the study, along with his notes for sermons and his thick volumes of the Victorian theologians. Antony was to become familiar with both during the future. Even now, at the age of four, he accepted punishment as a part of the external order that one cannot change. And his mother knew better than to rush upstairs at the outbreak of hostilities and attempt to make peace between father and son. But the whole house trembled when Antony's cries shattered the achieved calm of the Sunday evening. And to Winifred, who loved Antony with a disproportionate affection, his anguish was a direct condemnation of her own unthinkable treachery. For she guessed at once that her father had discovered the doll. And she was too frightened to go to the study and confess. She buried her face in the pillow till the storm had passed. . . .

Hours later, when Dorothy was asleep, and there were no more footsteps of grown-ups coming and going along the passages, Winifred sat up in bed. The night sky was faintly luminous, as if the moon shone behind some cloud. The black tangle of sycamore defined an irregular horizon across her window. Over the iron rail at the end of her bed was her small hump of garments placed there by Sarah in readiness for morning. Now that human life was stilled in the house, the house itself seemed to breathe. Cracks of sound startled her in the passage outside. There were vague, bumping movements from the floor below. Winifred slipped out of bed, crossed to the door, opened it, and listened intently. The darkness came at her like a live thing. She closed her eyes, and groped her way along the wall to Antony's room at the end of the passage. Her hands, clammy with sweat, managed to turn the handle, but it slipped in the groove, and a metallic clatter echoed through the house. Miraculously, no one woke.

Over against the wall she could see the rounded outline of Antony's small body beneath the honeycombed quilt. She knelt down beside him and pressed her cheek against his. He was asleep, but he flung himself over on to his side at her touch. His skin, ordinarily cool and firm like unripe fruit, was burning and rough with the exhaustion of spent tears. Drops of sweat beaded his upper lip. She experienced then, in her own nerves, the fragility and the infinite capacity to suffer of his young and tender flesh. The weals that his father had inflicted scorched her own body, as if she too ached and bled with Antony's wounds. She could not bear the burden of this vicarious suffering.

Repudiating a grief that was too great for her, she jumped up and, oblivious of the menacing, shadowy house, felt her way along the passage to the bathroom. Sifting through the clouds, a thin shaft of moonlight fell across the bathroom floor. She found the shelf and her fingers closed on a jar of ointment that was used when the children had minor cuts and scratches. She hurried back to Antony's bed and took him in her arms, whispering: "Antony. Antony, darling. Don't cry. Let Winifred put some ointment where it hurts——"

Withdrawn into an isolation beyond hope, her voice was merely an irritant to him, tearing and ripping the last defence of sleep. He huddled down into the mattress, his head slipping off the shallow pillow, one hand pulling fiercely at the bed-clothes. The moon, disentangled momentarily from cloud, shone serenely and coldly on to his narrow bed. Winifred said frantically: "Antony, please—— Let me put some ointment where it's sore—Antony! I'll give you my pocket-money for months and months. . . . Antony. . . ."

But he pushed her away. She sat up slowly. His honey-combed quilt was rough with the embossed pattern etched darker by the moon. On his little washstand the water-jug, more globular in this white light than she remembered it by day, stood in its basin. The soap bowl and the toothbrush jar, glazed and pale, stood in their usual places. The polished handles of the chest-of-drawers glittered. Everything was the same, yet nothing was the same.

Winifred knew then that there is a grief beyond grief, when love has been betrayed. The heart, failing in nobility, can bear no more, takes comfort as it can, and, fearing the exaltation of suffering, lays ice upon its wounds. She sat up, dry-eyed, and began to wonder what would happen to her if her parents should wake and find her in Antony's room. Already the episode of the doll was slipping into the past. Ragged clouds closed in again on the moon as, averting her eyes from the forlorn figure below the pale quilt, she crept quietly away and tiptoed to her own room. She slept heavily and dreamlessly, like one who had been drugged.

The destruction of the doll was never referred to again. . . .

Angela lifted her wet face, smiled at Winifred, and snuggled down more comfortably into the firm, encircling arms.

XV

WITH A patient of reasonable intelligence, it was unnecessary to dot the *i*'s of every lesson learnt, especially when some humiliation or disappointment had to be digested. So on the following Monday Winifred did not take up again with Lydia Bentley the subject of music or an artistic career, and was careful not to enquire about the condition of Lydia's hands.

Instead she turned back in her notes on Lydia to an earlier session when they had discussed together Lydia's love-affairs. For she wished to impress on Lydia that a middle-aged woman—and Lydia was forty-two—needed to face certain facts and wholeheartedly to accept them. For instance, Lydia was unmarried and likely to remain so; she was childless and must renounce the hope of maternity. Hard facts: but until they were willingly, even blithely, accepted, they would continue to generate the poison that permeated personality and distorted

it from getting the utmost from the limits of the possible. Winifred did not actively think this out. It was the premise on which her own career as a psychiatrist was built. She spoke of 'making a good adjustment', and often pointed with complacency to her own success in this ordering of her life. So many of her patients were middle-aged women—unsatisfied mothers, childless wives, or spinsters half crazy with suspense and disappointment—that she had come to rely on a few stock phrases to illuminate their situation. It was time, she thought, to deal with this side of Lydia's illness.

But first she had to read through the dreams which Lydia had noted during the week since her last visit. They fell into the usual pattern and she could find nothing fresh to say about them. As usual in her dreams, Lydia had difficulty in finding the doctor or in establishing communication between them. About that, Winifred could only disclaim responsibility. One could, she had often said in similar cases, only do one's best. The fault, when *rapport* failed to be established, lay somehow with the patient, who had refused to co-operate. However, there was one dream that touched her so nearly that she could not let it pass, for it carried an oblique criticism of her medical integrity.

"
'I was walking along a high road' (Lydia had written) 'that began and ended in darkness, and the sides of the road were hidden by dark clouds. One of your patients—I don't know her name, but I met her in the waiting-room on a recent visit—came and spoke to me. I asked her: "Why does Dr. Orwin call you by your Christian name?" She looked angry at my question and went away. I tried to follow, but the clouds closed up round me and I was lost.'

The patient, of course, was Maisie. Only very few of her patients were on Christian-name terms with Winifred and she took very good care that no one should know about those who were. Maisie, she could only suppose, had been talking out of her turn. She wished there were some way of muzzling the gossip that went on in the waiting-room. There were enough

magazines and newspapers provided to keep the patients occupied during the half-hour at most which some of them had to sit out till she was ready for them. Indirectly she paid for these papers, for did they not help, among other things, to swell her enormous rent? But no. Patients were too idle, too inquisitive—in a word, too neurotic—to sit still and mind their own business.

She said to Lydia: "Which of my patients were you thinking of?"

Lydia could not remember the woman's name, but she was able to describe her in intimate detail. A very excitable, distinguished, elderly woman; with curly black hair, a thin, haggard face and restless, deeply-sunk eyes. She was a tiny little thing really, but you hardly noticed this because her rather beautiful hands, when she was not chain-smoking one cigarette from another, were copious of gesture, and her lined, ravaged face ceaselessly worked as she talked rapidly about Winifred or fired questions at her retiring listener. It was impossible, said Lydia, smiling a little at the memory, not to get into conversation with her. She seemed rather jumpy, and wanted to know a lot in a short time. But there was something about her—Lydia found it hard to explain just what she meant—that was very attractive. She lived in Bayswater too, quite close to Lydia.

"I think I know who you mean," said Winifred, annoyed at the little flush of pleasure that had warmed Lydia's pale, averted cheek. Lydia was stretched on the couch as usual and had begun her session shivering, but whether from nervousness or from cold Winifred could not determine. It was one of those mild September mornings, when the colourless sky lay low over the grey terraces of Harley Street, and the trees of Regent's Park to the north, where the parallels met in summer to frame a tossing crest of illuminated green, were shrouded in haze. The neutral sky seemed to have seeped into the consulting-room itself, which, in spite of the flowers arranged along the tops of the bookshelves—white chrysanthemums and a vase of white dahlias—struck an impersonal note of austerity. Winifred, however, did not feel the chill of her room on body

and spirit. It was streamlined for her job, and within its limits comfortable. Her irrepressibly hankering for frivolity and flamboyance found other outlets. Colour was available to her through clothes, and, thanks to patients, she was never short of coupons. On this September morning she wore russet mixture tweed, and her nails were lightly tinted to reflect the suit.

"She—the patient, I mean—Miss——?" began Lydia, and waited in vain for Winifred to supply the missing name.

"Yes?" said Winifred repressively.

"She seemed rather agitated. . . . I didn't really like her very much, although I was so attracted by her in another way." Though her dislike, Lydia felt, might well be a form of envy. She, too, would have gladly dropped the 'Miss' and been known simply as 'Lydia'. Perhaps this unconfessed longing had prompted her to record the dream, which was not in any other way remarkable. But if she expected any such advance to intimacy she was disappointed.

Winifred dismissed the subject. "I know the patient whom you mean, and I do not think she is at all a suitable friend for you, Miss Bentley. It's unfortunate that you both live in Bayswater, but there's no need for you to meet——"

"But if I should run into her by chance——?"

"You can treat her with coldness," said Winifred firmly. "Tell her you're busy and make your escape."

"But I'm not good at snubbing people," remarked Lydia, her face contracting at the sudden thought that Winifred knew very well what she was talking about. Winifred would be an expert in the dealing of snubs. The pain of this recognition made Lydia add hastily: "But perhaps for her sake I ought not to talk to her."

It was an easy way out and Winifred took it. She explained that the patient was a very able woman but a very sick one too. "She exaggerates everything. She means well, but she is seriously disturbed. And I can only say to you what I always tell my patients in general. That it is a great mistake to talk to other patients and discuss your treatment. It does no good and it *always* leads to trouble."

"In that case," Lydia agreed meekly, "I won't see her again if I can help it." She was thankful that she had not blundered into talking about the young woman from Croydon whom she had also contacted in the waiting-room, and who had invited her so warmly to look in and have a cup of tea if ever she found herself in the neighbourhood and would care for a chat. Winifred would assuredly disapprove. And to Lydia the approval of her beloved doctor was more important than the friendship of all the patients.

Having dealt with Maisie, who was really very tiresome (though one knew she could not help it), Winifred now reverted to the hackneyed problem of sex. "Your father," she said, turning back the pages of her note-book till she reached the date of Lydia's second visit, "died when you were sixteen, didn't he? And you then went to live in rooms, and took a job in the City that made you independent of your stepmother?"

A little surprised at the change of subject, but pleased to find her history remembered, Lydia turned on the couch so that she could see her doctor more clearly. Lydia was so short-sighted that she had long accustomed herself to rely on hypersensitive hearing and psychological insight to relate herself to the perceptual world of people and things. She saw the consulting-room, but inwardly, as a cool, uncluttered space, with, in one corner, a domed and slippery couch that did not give to the limbs, and which had a slippery pillow and grey fringed rug. Winifred's face remained indistinct to her. She could only see a tapered oval, crowned by curls that dipped in the middle to rise above the temples as blunt wings. She would have preferred Winifred to wear some sort of uniform—a white doctor's coat, for instance. She both liked and was intimidated by the warm blur of Winifred's tweed suit, and her charming, cultivated voice with its beguiling undertones of intimacy, but she was frightened by the Jekyll-and-Hyde alternations between censure and warmth. She said: "Yes. My stepmother sold up the house."

"Didn't you find that very lonely?"

"It was at first." Lydia did not elaborate this. Poverty, even in retrospect, cannot be made to look romantic, and she did

not often, even to herself, recall the circumstances of that first, very sordid, job. Thirty-seven-and-six, as errand-girl, telephonist and stamp-licker, in a basement office behind Fenchurch Street Station, did not give much scope for self-respect. She paid twenty-one shillings in Camberwell for a bed-sitting-room with breakfast and supper, and the other sixteen-and-sixpence had to take care of fares and lunches and every other necessity. She stuck it out for nine months, working four evenings a week at night-school to acquire 'business' French and German, and to improve her shorthand.

"And then you had an interesting job with the White Triangle Travel Agency?"

"Yes. . . . I moved about from one job to another. . . . I hated City life. . . ."

"And finally you came to school-teaching. Piano and so forth."

"Until the war," assented Lydia, who had no need to be ashamed of her war record. In 1940 she became secretary to a small research group in one of the Ministries, and liked her four male bosses. Their energy and high spirits astounded her after fifteen years in a snob school of high fees and low standards, under a headmistress who was both shrewd and hypochondriac. "Then, when the war was over, I went back into teaching. . . . But it seemed wrong somehow. I could see the children were getting fobbed off with second-best in everything. It was all show to impress the parents, and we were none of us properly qualified to teach. We had no business to be there at all, really. . . . So I went back to office work. And now I've got this weakness in my hands——"

"I'm wondering," said Winifred thoughtfully, "if you've ever had a touch of this complaint before. You had a very difficult time after your father died, and your love-affair——" There was a delicate pause, while she waited with bent head for Lydia to adjust her thoughts to a painful subject, not yet fully discussed between them—"ended unhappily. What was your health like at that time?"

Lydia stared at her finger-nails, noting without much interest that they were cut too short and that the cuticles needed lotion.

The question took her back over the years to a point where her life had altered its direction. Before she was sixteen she had looked forward to a career of enthralling work, and when that outlet failed her she had gone on to the next thing. Love then seemed so important that she even wondered if she had not previously over-valued the importance of music. She set herself the task, the duty, of falling in love, and did not worry too much about the love-worthiness of the object. It seemed at the time the only sensible thing to do.

Obediently she tried to convey to Winifred something of the enchantment which is the tribute of youth and courage to the phenomenon of sex, but which, in retrospect, can assume an aspect as dingy as it was wasteful. . . .

To earn one's living, Lydia discovered, might be incompatible with a musical career, but it was certainly not incompatible with love. The City clerks and stenographers with whom she worked from the age of seventeen onwards astonished her by the success with which they combined their parallel lives. Lipstick, cigarettes, smart clothes, lists of presentable dance-partners, and clinical knowledge of all the alternative methods of birth-control—all these were no hindrance to speed and efficiency during office hours. She even decided that there was some correlation between the number of accurate words they could type in a minute and the number of affairs they could crowd into the short week-ends. All-round efficiency fascinated her, and she tried to be like them. This was hard, because she was by temperament absent-minded and dreamy. In spite of great care, she continued to make typing errors and to forget enclosures for letters. But she was anxious to please, and she did well enough to get by. In love she was more successful, for her irregular, small face, with the wide-set, blue-grey eyes, myopic but lit so readily by enthusiasm, attracted the discriminating, and she was easy prey to the good-timers of the dance-halls.

Still, during the four years between her father's death and her meeting with Desmond Ransome, no one wanted to marry her. It was really marriage she wanted. Marriage and children. She came to this knowledge gradually, for at first she accepted

kisses, and more intimate caressing in the dark, and finally the sleeping with men, as the pleasure and proof of maturity. The men with whom she slept did not want marriage. There was John who wanted variety, Sidney who was tied to his mother, and Alan who intended to marry money, with or without love. During those four years she experienced in her nerves the various sterilities that afflict the modern world.

John was a motor salesman, who knew London night-life, and who, while engaged to a girl in the north of England, made his principal diversion the seduction and corruption of very young girls. He took Lydia often to the Ham Bone club, of which he was a member; and she tried to mix her drinks sufficiently to enliven her conversation. But she only succeeded in giving herself a heavy and unattractive flush. He embarrassed her with lewd stories, and introduced her to drug addicts and homosexuals of both sexes. In the end she left him for boredom's sake, and because the frustration engendered by this acclimatisation to the ambitions and desires of the half-world sickened her to the verge of despair.

Sidney knew nothing of the half-world. He was a man well on in the forties, domesticated and flabby, with an inflamed interest in feminine underclothing and a sentimental delight in church worship and ritual. He was the prop and delight of a widowed mother, who tearfully disapproved of women and had the narrow, furtive intelligence of the larger apes. She looked like an ape. The lower half of her face protruded, her nose was flat, and she had a wide, simian mouth. The upper half of the face fell inwards, and the eyes were small, darting, and set in tiny, wrinkled sockets. Lydia felt sorry for Sidney. Compared with John, her first lover, of whom she was already weary, she showed up very well. The fact that his family had once known her father disinfected the early stages of their relationship.

They became friends, close friends, and eventually lovers. Into his liaison with Lydia, Sidney concentrated the force of a quarter of a century's dammed-up sensuality. He was also well trained by his mother to an almost feminine intuition and gentleness in the exchanges of daily life. Lydia made the

mistake of concluding he was peculiarly fitted for marriage and fatherhood. When Sidney told her that, although he loved her, he would never desert his mother for another woman, she was quite simply unable to believe him. They lived together for two years before she recognised that the mother had a more ruthless determination to get her own way and a deeper hold on his tenderness than any other woman would ever have.

She left him, and drifted into an affair with Alan. It was not serious on either side, for Alan wanted only money, and Lydia had ceased to believe in love. . . .

And it was just then, when she felt utterly hopeless, that she met Desmond Ransome.

"Desmond was different," she told Winifred, "from the other men I'd known. You see, he believed in things, and that seemed so novel after the other men I'd met. I really loved him. It was perfect happiness while it lasted."

"That was a very great pity," said Winifred severely. She had reserved this comment on the first hearing of the tale, and had glided over the virginity question with the adroitness of the expert. Detesting her psychiatric preoccupation with furtive near-copulations or sleeping arrangements which involved the constant passing from one partner to another, she had perfected a technique for reassuring the patient without giving away her own position. On the first hearing of a case-history, she would express no opinion at all. But later the patient would be made to feel ashamed of herself and to acknowledge what a pity it all was. Winifred could do this very well indeed. She looked down her neatly powdered nose at Lydia, and said kindly: "It is *always* a pity to anticipate marriage. It spoils things. No doubt he would have married you if you had held him off——"

"It wasn't like that with us," said Lydia, hurt. "We were really in love. It was on his side as much as mine."

Yet there had been no marriage. Did the little fool imagine, Winifred wondered, that any marriages came about that way? For Lydia was attractive. Those large, blue eyes, flecked only with grey, and readily startled, so that the curled lashes lifted widely to display the brilliant blue-white all round the iris, or

lapsing to melancholy, down-drooped, with delicate, veined shadow, and too sharp definition of the skull—they were eyes which in youth would be altogether lovely. And her face, whose asymmetry was now almost a parody of youth's calculated power to shock and to surprise, was no doubt once charmingly wanton—softly warm and alluring. Her hands too, with the noticeably long fingers and the breadth from the small finger joint to the base of the thumb, were the hands of an artist or a craftswoman. Yet her lover had left her.

"Tell me about it," said Winifred softly. Lydia was wrong, of course. Men recoiled from a promiscuous woman with the same instinctive repugnance which she felt herself, but she would have to repeat her little homily later. Lydia was not yet ready.

"He would have married me if only he'd lived longer. He died before he was in a position to make me a home."

"But how terrible that must have been for you!" Winifred let her voice vibrate with sympathy, playing with exquisite skill on the younger woman's sensibility. "I know from my own experience of bereavement——" She bent her head in a gesture of noble resignation. "There was a man once. . . . Our engagement was broken off by death. . . . That's why I never married. I always felt that love was so important——"

"I'm terribly sorry." Lydia flung over on the couch, aghast at her own thoughtlessness, and looked at the bent head with consternation. "I didn't realise—— I wouldn't have said anything——"

"But that's all right. I'm glad you did." Winifred raised her head cheerfully and managed a smile. "But to return to your lover——" She paused delicately and glanced at the notebook lying in her lap. "Was it illness? An accident? I see you mentioned he was sent to Spain——?"

"Yes. He died of food poisoning. He was out sketching one afternoon. In the evening he was taken ill and his father had to be sent for. But it was all over before anyone could reach him."

"And that was the end?"

"Yes, I didn't hear from him, though I expected to every

day. After a month I decided to ring up his home. His mother answered. She told me he was dead. They had buried him in a little cemetery near Ripoli."

"Why did he go to Spain in the first place?" asked Winifred.

Lydia found it hard to go on. She was not ashamed of her love for Desmond, which had always seemed to her much the most satisfying experience in the long futility of her life. But very obviously Dr. Orwin could not be expected to understand just how perfect and how wonderful the relationship really was. Some dim perception of a difference between their standards of values rose unbidden in Lydia's mind, which was consciously aglow and feverish with adoration, almost with awe. To Dr. Orwin, Desmond would necessarily seem just another man with whom for a short time she carried on an affair. One had to live with Desmond to know how differently he responded to life and responsibility from the ordinary run of young men in their twenties. Perhaps he was so much more mature than the rest because he had been born and educated abroad. His father was in the consulate, first in Paris, then in Cologne. During his adolescence Desmond attended school in Germany, and had passed two years at the universities of Cologne and Leipzig before entering Oxford at the age of nineteen. He had never developed, or had to unlearn, the inhibitions and crudities of the average public-school boy in the company of women. Consequently he was neither stiff nor cynical, sentimental nor shy. He loved Lydia, and it was natural to both of them that their love should take what satisfaction it could until such time as he could earn enough to marry. But death had defeated their plans, and after that nothing in Lydia's life had mattered any more. Until she met Dr. Orwin. . . .

"He was sent to Spain for three months to learn the language," said Lydia at last. But she spoke thickly, as if pain had thrown her thoughts into some confusion.

"Yes——? Go on, Miss Bentley."

"He stayed in a village in the Pyrenees——"

"Yes——?"

"Well—that's all," said Lydia with an effort. "He was

poisoned by something he ate or drank in one of the mountain villages. He was staying at an inn for a week to do some sketching. He was very clever with water-colours, though it was only a hobby. He had so many hobbies. He was interested in everything——” Her voice trailed into indifference. She did not tell Winifred of the one letter and the picture postcard which she had long ago destroyed. There was no point in preserving the written words after the warm human sympathy that infused with a peculiar intimacy his cool, ironic sentences, vanished for all time in the final and irrevocable withdrawal of death. She did not believe that personality survived the dissolution of the body, and Desmond would not have wished her to cheat her intelligence with fairy-tales. They were of their time: children of the post-war disillusionment. Only in his conviction that some old-fashioned stabilities mattered—the building of a home, and the subordination of one’s egoism to the needs of one’s children—did he differ from other young men who survived, or were too young for, the 1914 war. She did not, like Winifred, preserve his letters for future consolation. She put them on the fire, and watched them curl up, brown-black and paper-thin, till they fell into a heap of whitening ash. Her eyes filled with tears and then were dry again, as exaltation possessed her, and the past fell away, complete, and not to be diminished by the warming illusions of a truth-dodging sentimentality. There had been one letter from Spain and one picture postcard.’ *‘This amazing village street is the very colour it is painted. You may believe me, conditioned though you are to the decorous grey of our London streets. And I have several quires of paper in my luggage to write and tell you all I have been unable to say to you. And yet—how am I to express the inexpressible?’* That was his last communication with her. After that she heard no more.

“H’m.” Winifred considered the story and decided that parts of it might be authentic. But at this late date there would be much idealisation. The young man had died while the affair was still at its height and had stepped into a permanent shrine. It would be useless to tell Lydia now that, if he had lived, he would ‘probably have kicked her off when matrimony

became a serious, practical issue. Instead she said pleasantly: "But you had other friends after his death, did you not? Men friends, I mean?"

"Yes," admitted Lydia. "You've got to go on living somehow even if the bottom has been knocked out of your world. If you can't have what you want, you have to accept what's available——"

"But not in sex," said Winifred abruptly, pleased that Lydia had given her an opening to say what had been in her mind throughout the session. "And that is not merely my own personal opinion. I had dinner the other day with a very eminent psychiatrist——" She looked up, smiling, and recounted to her patient some opinions which had circulated recently round an august table at which, she gave Lydia to understand, she and some other professional people of the very highest standing discussed this problem of monogamy and promiscuity. "Our host was an eminent doctor, and a man of the world. He was in the forces in this war and rose to very high rank. And these were his actual words: 'When sexual standards go, all standards go'. So you see, Miss Bentley, your adventures in sex were not only a mistake from the worldly point of view; they were a sign of general immaturity." Her smile became reminiscent. "And incontinence is a most fruitful source of unhappiness. I see so much of it in my job. I have never succumbed to the indulgence and my life has been very happy. When you accept the need for sublimation, you will learn to be happy too. And then this affection of your hands will disappear."

"I seem to have been a failure in every way," remarked Lydia bitterly.

"Yet failure—or rather the courageous acceptance of failure—can be the turning-point of one's life," said Winifred and closed her note-book. "The one thing you must never do is to refuse to face the truth. I learnt that lesson many years ago, and after that I made a very good adjustment." She stood up, smoothed her jacket over her hips, and waited for Lydia to dress.

"I failed in music and I failed in love," repeated Lydia

sullenly, and crossed to the sofa, where her small black coat, quenched and rusty beside Winifred's opulent squirrel pelts, lay folded with the woollen gloves and beret on top.

"Failure sometimes strengthens the character——"

"I suppose so. But I ought to have done better than I have——" Lydia shrugged into her coat and made quite a business of doing up its two shiny buttons. Her hands were trembling and she felt so cold that she was terrified her teeth would begin to chatter if she opened her mouth. Dumbly she held out a hand to say good-bye.

XVI

OF HER own adjustment to overwhelming disaster Winifred felt she had every reason to be proud. When it happened—the desolating, shattering, unexpected blow that had knocked the bottom out of her own life—she did not, as Lydia Bentley was doing, take refuge in illness. Nor did she run away from her job. There was not, of course, she admitted to herself, the same opportunity to leave an environment that had become humiliating and impossible to her. At twenty-six, when her engagement was broken off by Clifford, she was earning between five and six pounds a week as social worker under Dr. Treherne. She had no money of her own. The only alternative to Walthamstow was a return to the rectory until she could find another job. And at the rectory they were all buzzing with excitement over Dorothy's approaching marriage to Charles. It was bad enough having to be bridesmaid to Dorothy without assisting in the preparations for Dorothy's wedding. So she stayed on at Walthamstow, and was grateful to Dr. Treherne for keeping her busy and for asking her no questions.

And indeed she would have been hard put to it to give any

explanation of the tragedy that had overwhelmed her. The blow, when it came, fell from a clear sky. It was her personal, individual tragedy, and there was nothing that anyone could do for her. She buried herself in work, and tried not to repeat to herself, over and over, the inevitable, useless and bitter question: *What happened. . . . And why?* . . .

Clifford was casual about appointments, and omitted sometimes to apologise when he kept Winifred waiting outside theatres, or at street corners, or, worse still, at the hospital gates, on their evenings out together. She suspected, rightly, that with his other friends—Kathleen Symonds, for instance, or her mother—his manners were irreproachable. At last she decided to teach him a lesson. And she chose an occasion when his friend Norman Hendrake, now married to Elaine Thorogood, could not help but notice. For some reason she was jealous of Norman. Some dim, profound instinct prompted her that only through Norman could she reach and wound Clifford's innermost pride. She was a little ashamed of her manoeuvre, which could not, by any standard, be judged respectable in a young, engaged woman. But she refused to explore the hinterland opened up by her unwilling recognition of Clifford's feeling towards his friend. At most, she told herself that it was natural for Clifford to resent Norman's engagement since it had broken up the happy partnership that had held the young law students together. And when Dr. Treherne very delicately hinted that Clifford seemed anxious to pay off some score against Norman, she laughed and forgot about it.

Yet it was this hint from Dr. Treherne that suggested the method of Clifford's punishment. And her opportunity came when Elaine Hendrake, now no longer a colleague, and putting on a lot of side as a married woman, invited Clifford and Winifred to a cocktail party at her Bayswater flat. Winifred let Clifford think she was coming; then at the last moment rang up Elaine from the hospital and excused herself. ". . . A headache. . . . Darling, I'd love to come, I'm sure it'll be wonderful, but I simply couldn't face a party to-night. . . . Yes, so am I, it's devastating. . . . Do tell Clifford, when he

arrives, won't you? I hope he won't be too cross with me. . . . Yes, I'll be seeing you some time. . . ."

She hung up the receiver, met her round, scared eyes in the mirror, and burst out laughing. Her cheeks were hot and she breathed too fast, but she was exultant at the thought of her own daring, and radiant with anticipation of triumph. She pictured Clifford at the party—distraught, distinguished, repelling the effusions of other women with easy irony, longing for *her*, envious of Norman. . . . As she went along the passage she met Dr. Treherne. "Off out to-night?" "No, I'm getting some beauty sleep." "You don't look to me as if you need it."

When she woke next day her bed lay in full sun. Catlike she stretched, letting the sunlight lap round her like a warm sea. A memory struggled through the confused wraiths of sleep. Clifford—— To-day she would hear from Clifford. He would ring up to know why she was not at the party. Concerned or indignant, it was all one—he would be showing her his need of her—the uniqueness of their private need for one another. He would understand after this how hurt she felt when he so often kept her waiting.

But something miscarried. She waited all that day and he did not phone. Several days passed. Struggling against a premonition of disaster, she tried to persuade herself that there was some quite simple explanation of Clifford's silence. Perhaps he was very busy, or perhaps he did not like to worry her when she was ill. There *must* be some reason and when they met, or when he phoned, she would hear it. She refused to consider the possibility that he would never phone.

A whole week passed. She dragged her feet as she walked along Euston Road to catch the east-bound bus for Walthamstow. As she passed the sham Roman façade of Euston Station, her eye caught the bright scarlet of the telephone kiosk, and she stood for a few minutes looking in through the glass at the black mouth of the receiver. She swallowed and her throat made a queer little strained sound. She would have been almost relieved to find she had no coppers in her purse.

Less than a mile away in his lodgings off Regent's Park, she could hear the bell shrilling on the landing outside his bedroom.

She could picture the scene very clearly. At this hour, eighty-three in the morning, Clifford would be up and breakfasting, probably in his dressing-gown. Contrary to the prevailing æsthetic fashion, it was a grey, masculine garment, rough-surfaced and corded with green. His pale hair, worn too long, would be falling over his eyes, and the eyes themselves, blue-grey like her own, but indifferent, ironic, would be heavy after hours of late study the evening before. But surely, at the sound of the telephone so early in the day, the irises of those remote eyes would absorb colour, and the heavy lids spring widely alert, and he would push away his breakfast plate and stride out into the hall, and answer with joy and relief because he would have guessed that it was Winifred who was calling him. He would hate the misunderstanding as much as she did.

The bell went on ringing. At first she could not believe that she was connected with the right number. It was impossible for Clifford not to hear that strident, measured summons from his early morning solitude. But there was no reply. Winifred hesitated, then re-called the operator and gave her the number clearly. "I'm sorry," the operator told her cheerfully after a few more minutes, "but there's no reply." "Oh, please——" Winifred's own voice was a husky undertone—"Please would you ring them again. I'm sure there's somebody there."

His landlady answered it at last. "Who, please? . . . Miss Orwin? . . . No, I'm sorry, miss, he's away. . . . Well, I'm sure I don't know. He's working very hard for his examinations just now, he did tell me he didn't want no messages. . . . Well, if you could make it convenient to ring again in a few days, miss. . . ." The receiver was dropped back with a click and a rattle. Winifred waited some time, expecting some sequel—a miracle perhaps.

She had a letter from him a week later. He wrote from his sister's home near Oxford and told her that mature consideration had convinced him that a marriage between them would lead to unhappiness, for they were temperamentally unsuited. He asked her to release him from the engagement. The tone of the letter was civil, the wording brief and to the point. Its

formality convinced her that, as far as he was concerned, the break was final. She replied by return of post and returned him the sapphire ring.

As for his letter, she hid it for a time at the back of her stocking drawer, handling it as a thing of horror, which yet, because Clifford had written it, she could not bring herself to destroy. Dr. Treherne, guessing more than she was told, kept her busy in out-patients during the next few weeks, then carried her off to Switzerland for a holiday. A fortnight later Winifred was back at work with a fine, golden tan, and the present of a cuckoo clock, carved, by Dr. Treherne's direction, with the Chaucerian motto: 'Let olde thinges pace.' Her first act on reaching home was to destroy Clifford's letter.

That autumn the house next-door to the hospital fell vacant. Dr. Treherne had long wanted it for an experimental children's clinic. She was willing to advance the purchase money free of interest, and she suggested that Winifred should organise a building fund for the repayment. With bazaars and rummage sales, weekly collections and appeals by circular, on top of her normal routine work, Winifred was left with very little spare time to grieve for what could not be amended. In the following year Dr. Treherne was able to persuade her to train as a doctor.

XVII

"HOW DO you think Mother's looking?" enquired Dorothy, when the sisters met again at their mother's house for Christmas. They were changing together in the spare room for dinner. They had not, after all, found time to visit each other since Dorothy lunched at Hampstead in September.

"Mother's no better and no worse. People of her age don't change very noticeably, you know."

"My dear Winifred, I could have told you that myself. I

want a medical opinion and some idea of a time limit. You've seen for yourself how she's been this afternoon."

"A year. Two years. Perhaps more. It's impossible to tell," replied Winifred after a moment's consideration. "There's nothing wrong with her except her age. Osteo-arthritis is the cause of her stiffness. But at eighty-plus——" Winifred shrugged her shoulders. This might easily, she reflected, be their last Christmas together, and for her mother's sake she would not be altogether sorry. As for herself, she found these family reunions fatiguing. After months of preoccupation with neurotics she needed a holiday from the problems of senility and disease.

And December this year had come on her unawares, after an autumn in which the elms and beeches of her garden were green well into October, and the guelder rose was slow to stain with pink and puce its springing and transparent leaves. The clematis, which in September still glimmered on her garden wall, had been cut down in October to within six inches of the soil. But the creamy polygonum, flowering for the second time that season, foamed over the high stone wall, while below the veranda the bush roses dreamed on of the golden warmth of summer. Anxious for the winter to pass, yet dreading a decision which might exclude her finally from an appointment to the Regional Board, Winifred had averted her eyes from the calendar. It was Christmas week before she began to consider her packing. In great haste, and with some borrowed coupons from Maisie, she bought herself a green evening dress. Having chosen it, she regretted it made her look haggard.

"Phoebe looks well, doesn't she?" said Dorothy.

"She's all bloom and blossom," commented Winifred, who with Charles and Dorothy had forgathered on the porch to welcome Nigel's car. Phoebe, pliant and willowy, vibrant with happiness and the certainty of pleasing, had presented her fiancé to her aunt with a pretty excitement. In this respect she was unlike Nigel, whose gravity and silence might serve to cover up shyness or be the cloak of something more formidable. With his narrow head bent slightly forward, and his long, carefully tended hands flexed with almost deliberate lack of tense-

ness, he said little, but continued to watch Phoebe with that tender but reserved affection that the Forresters, father and son, seemed to accord to the women they needed. Nigel, Winifred thought, was very like his father.

"They seem a nice family, don't you think?" said Dorothy, whose lifted arms akimbo left nothing of her exuberant bosom and heavy hips to the imagination. Restrained by a deep corset and good bra, she still looked monumental in her slip. There was something slightly ridiculous about elderly sisters together. 'We're like a music-hall joke,' thought Winifred, and agreed coldly: "His father was charming as a young man. His manners were so good." Clifford might have been one of her case-histories.

"Manners aren't everything, of course."

"But they're very important."

"He's taking Phoebe to a hogmanay party at Dr. Dewey's," remarked Dorothy, relieved by Winifred's manner, which could surely not remain so casual if any resentment still coloured her recollection of the Forresters. She sat down at the dressing-table and peered with dissatisfaction at the deepening crowsfeet around her eyes.

"Dr. Dewey?" Winifred hid her surprise, and achieved a pleasant note between detachment and brightness. "Yes, the Forresters and Deweys have known each other for a long time. It was I who introduced them, incidentally."

Or rather it was Dr. Treherne, she recollected, who had invited Dewey to make a fourth at her engagement party of twenty years ago. But Winifred was astonished to learn that Dewey and Clifford had become friends. They had, so far as she could see, absolutely nothing in common. And Dewey had never mentioned the Forresters to her, wife or husband, during all these years. Well, he was probably too tactful to remind her of an ex-fiancé. She could not fairly accuse Dewey of malice. All the same, she felt cheated by her failure to understand how Clifford, like all the rest of them, had danced on Dewey's string. Dewey was incalculable. And if he hobbled up like this, interfering in one's most intimate family concerns, where else would she come up against him? Just how

badly did he want that appointment to the Regional Board, for instance? And what strings could he pull to get what he wanted? It was intolerable that even here, in her mother's home, she was unable to free herself from her anxieties about Dewey. . . .

Mrs. Orwin lived nowadays in a small, terraced house, surrounded in all directions by similar terraces of dark brick, flowing north and south neat as tram-lines. Between the backs of the houses, cement paths and cut lawns were spaced out like postage stamps. When her husband was rector of this village, before it dissolved into suburbia, Mrs. Orwin was often heard to complain of her twenty-roomed rectory, which, she said, kept her continuously working. But now, with her double beds and towering sideboards squeezed into this tiny villa, she would complain humorously that she had no room to work. And when the six large adults arranged themselves round her rectory dining-table on Christmas evening, the tiny room, protesting against such a huddle and muddle of humans and upholstery, collapsed completely.

"I'm afraid you're going to miss Phoebe terribly when she's married," exclaimed Mrs. Orwin suddenly to Dorothy, who, stout and still spreading, sat below her father's portrait, and whose sharp little ruts round eyes and mouth quite obliterated the gap between the generations. Seeing always the clearer past superimposed on the blurred present, Mrs. Orwin was always disturbed when, momentarily disentangled from her memories, she saw her children look at her through the close-up of their contemporary faces.

"Oh, I expect we shall manage," said Dorothy cheerfully. "We hope Nigel will settle near Farehamstead."

"We can spare him Phoebe," grinned Charles, drawing a thin-bladed knife through the breast of the turkey and flicking off the slices with a neat turn of the wrist. "What we need is outside labour."

"Yes, poor Charles does have to work hard. Just imagine——" Dorothy turned to Winifred—"getting up at five-thirty when the spring comes and not knocking off till ten at night. We make nothing by it, either. Financially, I mean."

"Terrible," agreed Winifred, looking from Charles to Nigel, and twisting her silver Cellini ring impatiently round the third finger of her right hand. Her own crowded time-table, which for ever excluded the possibility of films and plays she longed to visit, and had never allowed her to be unpredictable like Dorothy, began by contrast to appear less harassing. She tried to remember what Charles's income was supposed to be. Perhaps, after all, her own four thousand a year was more than Dorothy had to spend, even allowing for the overhead expenses of a doctor's job. She said pleasantly, abandoning the ring: "You mustn't overdo it, either of you. You should enjoy life now that your children are off your hands."

"So we do," said Charles promptly, unimpressed by her sudden touch of professional concern. He smiled at his mother-in-law across the shining damask table with its garland of holly. A centre-piece of scrolled silver held a dozen roses from his own greenhouse in a smouldering circle.

"You'll certainly have to settle near Farehamstead," said Mrs. Orwin, beaming at Nigel from under her Edwardian frizz. "Then I shall have both you and Charles to visit me at Christmas. That'll be very nice." For she was devoted to Charles, whose temper was sweeter than the rector's, and who did not bore her with theology nor agitate her with anxieties temporal and spiritual. And she was not worried—had apparently not grasped the fact—that at present Nigel had no job.

"We will if we can," said Nigel briefly and lapsed again into silence. His head, however, remained turned in her direction, as if willing to exchange further confidences if she really wanted them.

"We have first to find a suitable property," Dorothy explained, with the old nervous trick of eyes and head.

"Now have you got everything you want, Nigel?" asked Mrs. Orwin anxiously. "Charles, don't forget that boys of Nigel's age want feeding properly. And after all the privation they went through in the war——"

"Don't worry about it, Mother," said Dorothy gently. "We can look after ourselves. I'm sure you've had too much to do already with all these preparations."

"Christmas would be a desolate time for me without them," declared Mrs. Orwin, and was quite sure she meant it.

For though she would not confess this even to herself, hospitality tired her both before and after. Her duties had fallen off one by one with the years, but she still felt guilty at the lightheartedness which, contrary to all her husband's forewarnings, gained on her with age. Inviting the family for Christmas was almost an expiation for this frivolity of heart. At over eighty she might well relax. Yet neither Dorothy nor Winifred could relax. And she suspected that, below the gloss of their apparent success, their day-to-day existence was more unsatisfying than the old, easy ways of the rectory, when nothing more catastrophic could happen than a flare-up of her husband's temper, or a change, at long intervals, of domestics.

Looking out of her window on to the street of mean little houses, her memory would slip back often to the old days when they all lived at the rectory. Pale fields in the autumn sunlight, and rooks patterning the winter sky above blowing trees. And further back still to the days of her childhood, which stood out with even sharper precision. Seaweed that drank colour from the cold and colourless tides. A beach of marbled shells. . . . Life, in spite of its anguish, composed itself for her in a series of sleepy afternoons. The sunless sky above the lilacs at the end of the churchyard. Black branches of hawthorn pricking the silver vacancy above. Beams of lemon and rose that lit the dust of the old church when the sun moved from the east window to the west. The violence and anger of children's voices in the distance, and their sharp screams of pain and their breathless delight.

It was all so simple in comparison with what the children did, or endured, to-day. She admired her children, but she could not approve of them. She thought of Dorothy managing the Grange with no servants. Of Antony in Australia, losing money on his fruit farm. Of Winifred she did not know what to think. Physical disease she could understand, and problems of morals or religion were adequately dealt with by the clergy. But that women should be willing to spend guineas in Harley Street just to have a *chat* with another woman seemed to her

extravagance indeed. However, there had always been plenty of women about with more money than sense, and no doubt that was fortunate for dear Winifred. Perhaps they had never, any of the family, been quite fair to Winifred. . . .

But none of them told her anything, and their very cheerfulness was part of the barricade that youth (in their fifties she still thought of them as 'the children') erects against age. Sometimes she wondered by what right she had won through to such acceptance, such content.

"And now we have Phoebe's wedding to look forward to," she ended happily. The faded eyes, milky-blue like Winifred's, but touched already to acquiescence by the foreknowledge of the approaching angel, rested tranquilly on her granddaughter's radiant and childish face. Sitting there between her father and her fiancé, Phoebe looked, Mrs. Orwin thought, very like Dorothy at the age of twenty. Her pale gold hair shadowed the charming flush along her cheek-bones, and her blue eyes shone with the secret excitement that is the prelude and certainty of love promised and reciprocated.

"You'll have to get better from that rheumatism, Grannie darling, and put your best bib on, and come and see us married," smiled Phoebe, and Nigel added: "Yes indeed. We shall send you the first invitation."

"If only," sighed Mrs. Orwin, "our dear little Moira could settle in the country near you." It was plain that to Mrs. Orwin this marriage between Phoebe and her jobless fiancé counted for more than all Moira's independence.

"Moira meets a lot of people," put in Dorothy hastily. "And she's still very young, you know."

"Who's to be best man?" enquired Mrs. Orwin of Nigel.

"Alastair Dewey. He's the eldest son of Dad's old friend, Frank Dewey. I wouldn't like," he smiled lopsidedly at Phoebe, "to get myself tied up without old Alastair in the background to give his blessing."

"I'm looking forward to meeting these friends of yours," said Dorothy. "Well, we shall see them in June, if not before."

Rather white, Winifred turned to Nigel. "Are your plans for the farm advanced as much as that?"

For the moment Nigel hesitated. "Not quite. We're looking into several, but I'm not in a position to say much about it at present." He smiled at her shyly, and she found herself, against her will, liking his reticence.

"I understand," said Winifred smoothly. "One realises, of course, the attractions of farming. Still——" She went on with the air of one honestly seeking information. "Is farming such a very good thing nowadays? Your father is a barrister, isn't he?"

"Dad's got brains. And he can talk people into swearing black's white. He'd be wasted in any other job."

"Oh, Nigel——" Phoebe put her hand on his arm appealingly. "You talk as if you had none yourself." She turned to her aunt. "It's nothing to do with that really, Aunt Winifred. Nigel thinks people waste such a lot of time talking, when all the time the world needs more food and more houses. Just arguing and being awfully clever gets nothing done."

"Phoebe talks a lot of rot," Nigel told her indulgently. "Why do you give me such a repellent character, Phoebe darling? Your aunt will detest me before she even knows me."

"My sister-in-law," remarked Charles amiably to no one in particular, "has such an excellent business head. She puts us all to shame."

Winifred turned on Charles the bleak and polite stare of enquiry usually reserved for inquisitive or presumptuous patients. Seen thus so close, yet divided by the invisible glass shade that separated her from her sister's husband, she could only find Charles unpleasing. His bucolic ruddiness, his brown eyes of a friendly dog, his refusal to be intimidated by her startling unlikeness to the other women of her family, rasped her nerves like an antagonism. "I was only going to say," she observed mildly, "that, for a young man about to be married, farming seems a little precarious."

"Isn't everything nowadays?" asked Nigel lightly. But the slight hardening of the muscles of his face told Winifred that the thrust had gone home.

Phoebe silenced him with a quick pressure of her fingers.

"Aunt Winifred doesn't mean it, Nigel. She adores the country as much as we do."

"Anyway," interrupted Charles quietly, "they've settled the date of the wedding. So everything's organised."

Winifred lifted her white face and met Charles's ironical eyes, fixed on her with the look she had come to expect from Charles. A look of understanding, of secret amusement, of unwilling admiration, and—yes, she had to admit it, little as she liked it—of compassion. She pushed her plate away and said abruptly: "Yes, I knew the wedding was to be some time in June. It's a pity. Because I for one shan't be able to come. I shan't be in England."

"Not in England?" they exclaimed, forgetting Phoebe.

'Damn,' thought Winifred, 'why did I say that?' and realised that there was no going back on an unequivocal statement. Carefully not seeing any one particular face, and raising by her detachment a barrier between their curiosity and her private, anguished longing for escape, she improvised rapidly: "No, I'm going to stay with Antony in Australia for a few months. Next summer is the only period when I can manage to be away."

"But that will be lovely for you," discovered Dorothy, who shaped all events touching the family to a picture of luck or delight.

"A good idea." "Marvellous." "How perfectly thrilling." "I wish *I* could go with you." Their congratulations tumbled about her ears like small stones from a peashooter. "Yes, won't it?" said Winifred.

They all started to question her at once, and she was surprised to find her plans so clear-cut and definitive. "No, I should have no difficulty in getting a passage . . . invited to lecture by the Faculty . . . excellent excuse . . . I shall stay for a few months once I'm there. . . . Yes, I *do* feel I've earned a holiday. . . ." And all the time she was talking, something shouted voicelessly in the background of her mind, insisting on a hearing: 'That's done it, you fool, and now you'll have to go whether you want to or not. Why the hell did you have to go and talk about it to the family, of all people, when you

know they keep coming back and back to the same thing? How *can* you go, while the Regional Board appointments are still under consideration? And with Dewey on the spot to grab your place if you turn your back for one single instant? You fool, you've done for yourself, and whose fault's that? Fancy letting Phoebe get you rattled, and that bumptious little fiancé of hers.' While aloud she heard herself saying: "Nothing's settled, of course. This is in confidence."

"But you must tell us," said Dorothy, her whole consequential figure vibrant with curiosity, "all about your plans." She hoped devoutly that nothing would 'happen' to their mother just when Winifred was going away. Sometimes she felt there was a lot to be said for being single. She was already speculating on the presents Winifred would be able to bring them back from Australia.

XVIII

"LET ME give you a brush down, Frank," said Clifford, as the young people began dancing to the gramophone through the ground floor rooms of Dr. Dewey's crumbling house on Beulah Hill. It was the last hour before midnight of hogmanay. "You've managed to acquire a delicate white bloom. Did you fall in a flour bin somewhere?"

"It must be the D.D.T.," said Dewey ruefully. His dinner-jacket was from Savile Row, but he contrived to look, as always, obstinately rural. Above his shrewd little eyes and plump, pink cheeks his daughter, Aileen, had tied a cone-shaped paper hat. "I sprinkled the cupboard under the stairs when we discovered the moth in my overcoat. And I crawled in there to-night when we were playing 'murder'."

"H'm. Well, I should hate to have you on the side of the prosecution when I have a shaky witness to put up." Clifford began to beat his friend's back with the clothes' brush. "Poor

old Alastair stood up to you remarkably well till you got in that crack about schoolmasters. Keep still while I get this off your collar—— To accuse your own son of an overwhelming urge to violence——!”

“Quite a reaction, wasn’t there?” Dewey grinned. “Come on up to my den and have a drink.”

Clifford followed his host to the first floor, and Dewey switched on the desk-lamp of his consulting-room. “Sit down. There’s the tobacco jar. Help yourself. Whisky?” Across the electric fire he pulled a worn leather chair on to the hearth-rug. “Forgive me yawning. I don’t want to be inhospitable. They say the young people of to-day are born tired. Can’t say I’ve noticed it.”

Clifford lowered his lean, long back into the chair where by day the patients would sit and stammer out their pitiful histories. “My dear fellow, the children have yet to show if they can stand the routine of peace-time jobs like you and me.” Clifford pushed the tobacco down with his thumb, staring over the bowl of his pipe at the blunted profile of the doctor, tipped a little wearily against the back of the chair. The flickering light of the mock coal fire played over his drooping eyelids. ‘Looks every inch of fifty,’ thought Clifford, and was brought up by a jerk at his own astonishment. Why should one expect Frank Dewey to remain young while one’s other contemporaries grew visibly more prosperous, more authoritative, and more willing to let the world wag in its old way? “The young fellows who were in the war—Nigel, for instance, or your Alastair—have had all the kudos of an essential job, with the maximum of adventure and the minimum of personal responsibility. It was a great life while it lasted. But it ended like the turn-off of a switch.”

At the undercurrent of bitterness in his tone, Dewey shifted uneasily. “Your own sense of adventure is not exactly atrophied. Still, one accepts responsibilities in middle life that would have seemed an intolerable slavery when one was young. One’s job. . . . One’s family. . . . I suppose we choose one or two among the various forms of slavery that offer themselves to us. And, having chosen, we persuade ourselves

we like them—an identity of interest that appeases our pride, and offer us the illusion of contentment.”

Clifford passed a long hand over his beaked and desiccated profile. “Nigel wouldn’t agree with you. Did you ever see such a perfect specimen of the human frog on the right shade of leaf?”

“I don’t blame him. Phoebe’s a good lass. And where Nigel’s concerned, my standard’s high.”

“She and Kathleen hit it off very well,” remarked Clifford. He crossed his legs and settled lower on the faded cushions. Behind him, on the walnut writing-desk, Dr. Dewey’s neat array of steel pens and coloured pencils glittered in the yellow circle of light below the reading-lamp. “I suppose I shall have to meet her aunt sooner or later——”

Dewey said quietly: “Dr. Orwin has acquired quite a reputation since she moved to Harley Street.”

“You ought to be there yourself,” Clifford accused him abruptly.

An expression of distaste showed for a moment in Dewey’s face. He had been confronted with the same suggestion before. Waving a hand vaguely at the wide and shabby room, he said: “I have a sort of affection for this place. What’s wrong with it? It’s in the centre of a very populous area. And not too far from my hospitals. And the patients seem to like coming here.”

Clifford turned his beaked profile towards his friend. His thin and brittle features, coldly expressionless from too long and too intimate a contact with treacherous and frightened people, softened as he remarked: “Yes, but *what* patients?”

“Aren’t you being mildly snobbish?” asked Dewey, amused. For he found it difficult to establish his patients in financial hierarchies. If anything, he had more sympathy for the neurotic poor than the neurotic rich. This, he realised, was a prejudice due to his upbringing and needed to be watched. His own origins were not distinguished. He was the eldest of three sons of an engineer’s fitter, who died while his boys were still at school. After their father’s death, every meal set on the table, every book and instrument bought, was a triumph of economy and effort: their mother waiting on the lodgers; the boys on newspaper rounds, or taking jobs as labourers at a

shilling an hour during vacations. To Dewey, the psychiatrist, every young man patient was in a sense a younger brother to be helped over difficulties that were not his fault; every woman, a human being temporarily beaten by loss or financial strain, or struggling under burdens that she could not be expected to shoulder alone. Of these things he never spoke: they were part of his equipment as a human being, and from them he drew his strength.

Clifford hunched his narrow shoulders, tipping his glass so that the coin-like surface of the whisky sparkled back at him from an ellipse. "There's such a thing as façade. Don't be tiresome, Frank. You'll never get really important people trailing out to Beulah Hill. They'll think you're phony."

"But I make three thousand a year here," said Dewey, surprised.

"Well, you ought to make more." Clifford was a shade impatient. "You were speaking just now of responsibility. A family man can't afford philanthropy. As for the poor, aren't there clinics to take care of them?"

"Not nearly enough. No. I've no wish to change."

Dewey looked round his familiar study, seeing as something precious its deep chairs where patients could relax, its fluted curtains that by day framed the wilderness of grey-green garden, and its drawers and filing cabinet in which was docketed so much observation of human frailty and failure. Beyond the faded curtains, once a cheerful blue, the fall of the land to the south was hidden from him. Dr. Dewey, who by day schooled his mind to an alert passivity, loved the sudden lapse into perspective, when, by a mere turn of his head, he could lay this tragedy, that farce, against the cool background of the Surrey hills, of the clouds driving low over the map of copses and fields, and the far-off ballooning of white smoke, where a train, invisible in a cutting, carried travellers to the coast. But at night, when the perspective was hidden from him by a blind and his world dwindled to the few square feet of light below the reading-lamp on his desk, he was often conscious of a greater liberation. It was as if his narrow and intense preoccupation with the enclosed world of another mind

forced open a door. Reading the notes of the day, he would hesitate, running his pen through a too facile diagnosis, checking with humility the obvious conclusions that, tricked out in the jargon of his profession, seemed to explain everything away. He would admit, though not in despair of helping his patient, that no one had the right to pass judgment. Even professional judgment, set against the darkness glimpsed through the forced-open door, was an impertinence. His long blue curtains, that hid from him England, set him free in the frontierless country of the mind.

Clifford sat up suddenly and looked keenly at his host. "What'll happen to you if this Health Scheme goes through?"

"I can't say about that." Dewey stared at the flickering electric fire, perturbed at the unexpected anxiety which the question aroused in him. "I'm already very overworked at both my hospitals. I may be put on the local management committee. Possibly a teaching hospital. I'd like, of course——" He broke off, realising his voice lacked conviction, and sat very quietly, staring at the fire between narrowed eyelids.

"Well," said Clifford curtly, "you *ought* to be at the top running it. With your experience—and your reputation——" He looked round the room and added with a smile: "In spite of what I said about Harley Street."

Dewey shrugged his shoulders, surveying his own memories of cases imperfectly handled and treatment prematurely brought to an end. He said wistfully: "I'd like to be appointed to the Regional Board." He swung round, his eyes bright with energy, the absurd blue paper hat, which he had forgotten to remove, glittering in the lamplight. "You know, Clifford since I've been publishing books on psychology, I've been amazed at the letters I get from people all over the Country. One would say the last fifty years of research are moving to a crisis. If psychiatry can stake its claim when this Act becomes law, I believe we shall take as great a step forward as the seventeenth century took when it moved from astrology to controlled experiment!"

"I believe you're right." Clifford stretched out a hand to his glass and finished off the whisky. "No, I won't have any

more, thanks. . . . Well—all right. A finger. But only to drink to your success when the appointments to the Regional Board are made. Not that I've any doubts myself. You're too well-known. Even the Civil Service must have dipped into some of your books."

"An appalling thought——"

"Well, some of them are educated. How's the present one coming, by the way?"

Dewey glanced towards his desk. Files of reports about patients to the right; and to the left the page proofs of his latest book, which by now had the physical appearance of a book. So many chapters finished; others still to be checked through; a new introduction to be drafted. Perhaps when it was finished he would have to reshape the whole thing. Much depended on the contents of the right-hand drawers. For it was the work done with his patients that supplied the material for his books. "Not too badly. It should be in the publishers' hands very soon now."

"What's it called?"

"*Self-Transcendence as a Goal of Therapy.*"

"Self-Transcendence?"

"Yes, it's a phrase of Koestler's. What Freud called 'the oceanic feeling'. But I think Koestler has coined a more meaningful term. He uses it to define the integrative tendencies of individuals and societies, as opposed to the self-assertive. Health, or wholeness, would imply the dynamic equilibrium of the antagonistic forces."

"Well, here's mud in your eye, Frank. I'll be——"

But Dewey was not attending. Two little ruts had appeared over his nose. His clean-shaven face was assuming a look of worry, almost of guilt. And from below, sounds of scuffling floated up, and bursts of laughter, and there was a sudden stampede up the stairs which led to the study. "What the——"

"It's the children," apologised Dr. Dewey with a hurried glance at his wrist-watch. "I thought so. Nearly midnight. I promised them I'd officiate at the first-footing. You Sassenachs wouldn't know about that. Damn! Hope they haven't chosen me someone heavy to carry over the threshold——"

He pushed back his chair and trotted across to the door. As he flung it open, all the family burst in on him at once—Alastair and Ian and Aileen, and behind them Clifford's children, Nigel and Helen. Phoebe was nowhere to be seen.

"I give in," panted Dr. Dewey, thrashing right and left with his arms. "I give in. I'll come quietly. Aileen, I'll carry in Tessie O'Shea if you insist, but for God's sake let me walk down my own stairs like a Christian."

"Oh no, sir," laughed Alastair, half propelling, half lifting his father towards the front door, "nothing doing. We deposit you on the step with Phoebe and shut the door on you. No more escapes into that den of yours for a quick one with Mr. Forrester. And that," he added, with a glance up the stairs to where Clifford, melancholic, sardonic, watched the mêlée tumbling through the hall, "goes for you too, sir."

"The body is at your disposal," said Clifford politely, and clicked out the switch in the room behind him.

His last sight of Dr. Dewey, as the clock struck twelve, was of a chubby hand frantically clutching a blue, pointed paper hat which had slipped over one pink ear. Then the front door banged and Dr. Dewey disappeared into the night.

XIX

WORN OUT by the extra work of Christmas, Jean presented herself at Harley Street on the following Monday afternoon in a mood of extreme foreboding. She had missed the two previous weeks because of the holiday, and, in spite of the children's excitement over presents and parties, had not been able to distract her thoughts away from her relationship with Winifred. She had tried to find some relief by continuing to write out her dreams. By the time she met Winifred they looked like a small book. The consulting-room, chilly as usual, repelled her by its display of Christmas

cards and calendars from other and no doubt more valued patients.

Winifred greeted her pleasantly enough, however, and surprised Jean by noticing for once the coat she was wearing. "That Persian lamb of yours is quite charming."

Jean's fur jacket, lined with cream satin, gleamed up at them opulently. Outside the windows, Harley Street was disappearing into the early darkness of the January afternoon. While Jean arranged her things—coat in narrow folds, hat, gloves and scarf in a careful row—Winifred crossed the room and jerked at the cord that loosed the long curtains to fall heavily across the frosted windows. Only the middle jets of the gas fire were alight. "I'm very fond of Persian lamb," went on Winifred conversationally, as if, however impersonal her attitude to the patient might in general be, on the subject of clothes they might, without impropriety, both be girls together. "It's soft. And pretty. And feminine. I have a Persian lamb coat myself. Not," she smiled, "that I bought it. It was a present from a friend."

Winifred's coat, however, was not quite a present. It had come as a gesture of exaltation on Dr. Treherne's part, when Winifred had at last felt free to give up general practice and move to Harley Street.

The occasion was a winter afternoon such as this—chilly, with a dead, yellow sky that impressed on the stone canyon of Harley Street the inhospitality of the desert. Dr. Treherne, after a journey from Walthamstow in an unheated taxi, had plumped herself down on the couch in Winifred's new consulting-room and looked round her with a pride that was both radiant and touching. She was profoundly moved. "It's rather lovely, isn't it?" said Winifred quickly, as if this establishment of herself as a Harley Street consultant were entirely unremarkable. But as she tided Dr. Treherne over the crisis, she promised herself passionately that she would make the grade. "This is what you always wanted for me, isn't it?" She put a hand on the older woman's shoulder. "I owe all this to you. I do hope you won't be disappointed with me." And a week later, the Persian lamb coat, folded within sheet on sheet of

crackling tissue paper, was driven up to Hampstead from a Bond Street furrier. It was Dr. Treherne's gesture of certainty that Winifred would never disappoint her.

But Jean, knowing nothing of all this, was astonished and delighted by Winifred's show of interest. It was something unprecedented. In fantasy—and Jean these days was living copiously in a world of day-dream—Winifred always appeared to her as a goddess figure, impeccably and charmingly dressed, but remote in distance and darkness. Oceans tossed walls of water to the threatening sky and crashed at her feet, spreading on the slanting beaches a swift desolation that divided her from the comfort of Winifred's voice, the touch of her hand. But now the clouds were melting into the friendly blue of the sky, and Winifred came close to her, standing on the yellow meadow by her side. In a sudden access of joy Jean stammered: "I didn't buy mine either." For in her humility she could not let Winifred believe her able to afford luxuries that were out of reach of the unmarried woman. "It was a wedding present from my mother-in-law," she explained.

Too late, she knew she had said the wrong thing again. The lovely friendliness faded and Winifred's expression went bleak.

Winifred said in a changed voice: "Give me your dreams," and, turning to the bureau, began to busy herself with the papers on the slab. It took some time to sort out Jean's notes from the accumulated mass of the past week. The sympathy which the Persian lamb coat had set vibrating between them had gone dead. Miserably Jean took a few of the sheets of note-paper from her bulging handbag and said in an over-bright, high-pitched voice: "They're mostly on the same subject this week, I'm afraid. I'm sorry they're so dismal." She lay down on the couch and settled herself below the grey rug.

"They certainly are rather unhappy," remarked Winifred a few minutes later. Jean's prolixity depressed her, she disliked the laborious, childish handwriting, and there were far too many dreams to tackle in half an hour. "I think we'll take this one first—the dream about Mrs. Fraser. I'll read it aloud to you to refresh your memory."

“‘I was trying to visit yqu’” (she read rapidly). “‘When I got to Victoria there were such crowds of people it took me a long time to come here. My feet were leaden. My journey lasted all day, and when I got to Harley Street it was dark. I lay down on your couch, and turned so that I could look out through the open window. The sky was full of stars, and great black clouds were moving in the wind. They hid the stars and then the stars shone through again. I could feel the wind blowing through my hair and cool against my cheek. I didn’t speak to you. I felt very lonely. Then you came and lay beside me on the couch and put your arms round me, and I relaxed and told you all about my life. Only it wasn’t just you who were with me here. It was someone I knew years ago, a Mrs. Fraser. She had Mrs. Fraser’s dark curls and a gold dress. But she spoke with your voice and I think it was you really.’”

Winifred sat silently for a moment, re-reading the lines about herself. Grimly she decided she must tackle the latent homosexuality in the second half of the dream before considering the anxiety implicit in the difficult journey of the first half. “This dream shows a desperate need of comfort,” she said at last, meeting Jean’s eyes with some sternness. “Who was this Mrs. Fraser?”

“She was a woman I knew when I was nineteen,” said Jean faintly. She was lying with the grey rug tickling her chin, and staring at Winifred’s Botticelli Madonna over by the door, but noticing nothing except a blurred rectangular darkness and the pale, cold walls that stretched up and up into a chill infinity. “I was very fond of Mrs. Fraser,” she said dreamily.

“Dark curls and a gold dress?” queried Winifred in her businesslike way: very staccato. “That part’s not me. Why do you confuse her with me?”

“I don’t know. Except that I liked her very much—” And indeed, thought Jean, surprised, it was years since she had even remembered Mrs. Fraser’s existence. For Mrs. Fraser belonged to another world: to the sterile world where she believed herself happy, until she met Carey and lost her own

identity in child-bearing and endless, exhausting housework. With these Mrs. Fraser had nothing whatever to do, and wanted nothing. For she would have contemplated Jean's present activities with derision and disgust.

"That feeling for a woman is not necessary in your case," Winifred said bluntly. "You have a husband, and children. They should be your source of comfort." She looked at her patient with some anger.

"But I don't feel like that about Carey," explained Jean, horrified. She began to stammer badly, trying hard not to mind how she was blushing. "I—I—I don't want that sort of—comfort from him."

"Why not?" asked Winifred with a faint shrug. "It's available." She was remembering, not Jean, but the faces of many women, spinsters like herself, who had lain on the same couch where Jean lay, and wept tears of chagrin and despair because of the comfort that was not available to them in any form that society would tolerate.

"But you don't understand," said Jean helplessly. "It wasn't like that at all with Mrs. Fraser."

"Well, suppose you describe Mrs. Fraser to me. . . . Was she older than you or younger? What was her job? Had she any children? And so forth."•

"Oh." Jean sounded relieved. "She was quite a lot older than I. I suppose when I knew her she was about forty. She was married to an awfully nice man who was very much in love with her. She hadn't any children. I think," said Jean, wrinkling her forehead, "she was an artist. Sort of. You know the kind of people—" she looked up with more confidence, for in matters of art she regarded Winifred as the expert—"who take an interest in art but never do very much at it. She painted water-colours, and used to model queer little faces—coloured ones—to hang as plaques on the wall. She was quite clever, I think. But she never got very far." Jean paused for comment, but Winifred was looking steadily at her book. "That's all about her I can remember. Except that Tony and I—Tony was the boy I was in love with—used to visit her a lot. We always went there to tea on Sundays. And Tony took

her flowers and chocolates. When Tony and I split up, he still kept up with her. I used to hope, if I went on visiting her, I'd get news of him. You see, I loved him, even though we'd split up. And I always thought she was interested in us—well, both of us, I mean. But I suppose she only liked him. Because she was terribly bored with me afterwards and I stopped going there any more. I can't tell you anything more about her." There was a long pause. Awkwardly, miserably, as if it explained everything, Jean repeated: "She hadn't any children. . . ."

The foolish and dangerous words spattered into a silence that had become menacing. Then: "So she looked after you after an unfortunate love-affair," said Winifred expressionlessly. "That, I suppose, is the parallel with me."

"Oh yes, I'm sure it is," said Jean with relief. "Though I think Mrs. Fraser being an artist had something to do with it. You were an artist too, weren't you?" Gratefully she indicated with a slight movement of her head the print of gulls and the safe Botticelli on the walls, the recessed shelves packed with books, and Winifred's green tweed suit with its silk shirt and bow of white and green. And, most respectfully of all, Winifred's hands—surgeon's hands, musical hands—calm on her lap where the case-book rested. Winifred had told Jean many things about herself, but nothing so deeply impressed Jean as the capacity and precision of those white fingers, that could both tenderly guide the surgeon's knife, and arouse with power and sweetness music and melody.

"I don't know anything about music," said Jean humbly, "but I've always thought artistic people were wonderful. I suppose that's why I admired Mrs. Fraser so much." The admiration faded from her eyes, as she followed the line of her own body, humped and clumsy beneath Winifred's grey, hand-knitted rug. It hardly seemed the moment to tell Winifred that Carey, impatient at Jean's lack of progress, had threatened to break up the marriage. Even more, it seemed an impertinence to bring to Winifred's notice the urgent, necessary chores of a mother who did her own work—babies dribbling on bibs; how to train with the pot; how to keep a demanding husband at

arm's length when one was too tired to feel anything but an overwhelming need for sleep. Faced by Winifred's exquisite skills, Jean could only regard her own incessant, trivial activities with repulsion and an attempt at apology.

And indeed she felt now, lying on Winifred's couch, very little older or wiser than the girl of nineteen who had sat uneasily on the edge of Mrs. Fraser's arm-chair and watched the firelight glow along the folds of Mrs. Fraser's gold silk dress. Phrases danced in her mind, and her fingers closed on the grey rug in retrospective anguish. *She doesn't want me—I ought not to have come—As soon as I can decently go, I'll say good-bye to her and never come back—She doesn't want me—I ought not to have come.* . . . That was how she had felt, talking to Mrs. Fraser, and it seemed to fit very adequately the sense of inferiority that was aroused in her by the presence of Winifred. Her unhappy gaze fixed itself on Winifred's hat lying beside her own woolly cap on the sofa. A confection of velvet swathed in ribbons. Mrs. Fraser had worn little hats like that too, only Mrs. Fraser trimmed hers with wreaths of wallflowers or sprays in her favourite shades of cinnamon and flame. It seemed extraordinary to Jean that both women should choose to wear the same kind of a hat. If one came to think of it, and she did now deliberately think of it, Dr. Orwin was a tremendous wearer of hats. Feathers. Pompoms. Pill-boxes. Flowers. Why, she must spend more on hats in one year than Jean had spent on her entire wardrobe since Hugh was born. More than ever it became apparent to Jean that Dr. Orwin could not possibly be expected to understand the problems of an obscure and dowdy housewife. Carey was wrong. He should never have sent her to Harley Street.

"I can't think of anything more to tell you about Mrs. Fraser," said Jean heavily, and turned away so that she could no longer see Winifred's cold expression and frighteningly impersonal room. Along her cheek-bones burnt a narrow flush and two deep ruts drew her eyebrows close together. Clinically she might have been any patient suffering the onset of a fever. She had understood Winifred's accusation of homosexuality well enough, but she had neither the vocabulary nor

the courage to challenge it. Mrs. Fraser had been double her age and had seemed to care for her. So she loved Mrs. Fraser. It was as simple as that. . . .

For, like many of Winifred's patients, Jean had reached out to sex for the love that her parents had no capacity to give. And when her lover deserted her she turned for sympathy to the friend who had shown so charming an interest in herself and Tony. Mrs. Fraser enjoyed them as a partnership, but was exasperated when the female half of it kept returning to her house to talk about love. Broken-hearted by the loss of Tony, Jean was hurt and disillusioned by Mrs. Fraser's indifference. It was in this mood that she met Carey Martin at a dance, and several months later married him. It was Carey's first important love-affair, and was destined to be his last.

And the marriage turned out as well as could be expected. Carey bought a bungalow on the suburban fringe between London and Surrey, and Jean furnished it with the help of the furnishing supplements of the magazines and the hire-purchase departments of the Croydon stores. There was little love on Jean's side of the marriage, but she was addicted to the cinema, and by identifying herself with the stars made herself sufficiently glamorous for Carey to be proud of her when they walked down Croydon High Road, on Saturday afternoons.

And then the children came—three boys in succession—and Jean ordered the *Nursery World* from her newsagent instead of *Sidelights on Hollywood*, and forgot to paint her nails, and there was no money for hair-sets when the doctor's bills and the chemist's and the bills for baby foods had been paid. For the boys were all delicate, and Carey's salary, which would have kept a bachelor in comfort, could not easily be stretched to take care of five. Jean became exhausted, and looked it. Carey felt hurt and showed it. For they were profoundly divided in their attitude to the children—Jean wanting the babies, Carey wanting only Jean. But until the war came, neither of them considered the possibility of a separation. Both came from middle-class Puritan stock, believing that bonds, once contracted, should be honoured, and both admired stability.

It was all so ordinary, and—yes, now that she knew Winifred—so terribly second-rate. How could one expose to so altogether exceptional a person as Dr. Orwin how silly and uninteresting one really was? Especially since she loved Dr. Orwin with an exaggerated passion such as she had not experienced since her 'teen-age. . . .

"It's a pity," said Winifred smoothly, "that you are so afraid of dependence. You make it very difficult for me to help you."

"I'm sorry," Jean murmured, and put up a hand to the back of her head, where strands of limp, untidy hair had escaped from the roll. She pushed them back into the net and said quickly: "I always look forward to coming. But it's just—oh, I don't know. I just find it terribly difficult to talk."

"Well—you don't do too badly." Winifred tapped the wad of notepaper with her fountain-pen and smiled slightly. "You bring the dreams, for instance, and we discuss what arises from them."

"Yes, I bring the dreams," said Jean, with unintentional irony.

For somehow—unaccountably—life goes on. It went on after Tony left her, or else why should she be here, stupidly stretched on the couch and feeling so ugly, so unworthy, so poor? In those days, too, she often wished she were dead.

But life went on. She had trained as a librarian after leaving school, and every morning had to drag herself to the library where she worked, and stamp the books and answer queries. 'Yes, I'll find you a book if you like. . . . Love or detective? . . . Well, what about the latest Ethel Mannin? . . . Or, more rarely: 'We'd be pleased to try and get it for you from the Central Library but you'd have to pay the postage. Is that all right?' Somehow, miraculously, she went on living.

"And I think you have made very good progress so far," said Winifred.

Would you call it progress? She had progressed, too, after Tony left her, and when Mrs. Fraser showed her very plainly she was not wanted any more. "Yes, I suppose I have made progress," said Jean wistfully. "But I don't discuss—well, you know—what Carey sent me for."

Feeling she was getting somewhere at last, Winifred made her voice very soft. "We can remedy that, can't we? How are things between you now?" For she was intoxicated by her easy tact in handling sexual difficulties. The experienced patient might fidget and flush, but she remained outside, exalted and cool, her virginity a matter for congratulation, her esoteric knowledge a target for envy. Her thin lips curved in a charming smile.

The question hung delicately in the air between them, and for a wild moment Jean imagined herself telling Winifred everything. But not from the couch. Winifred, thought Jean, and knew that she was indulging the stupidest, most futile of day-dreams, would have to put the black note-book away in the drawer, and they would build in the cold hearth a blazing fire of logs. The room would come alive. She was thirsty for life—— dying of thirst, and the oasis within hand-reach but forbidden by the invisible barrier erected by Winifred between them. Such a lovely room. Firelight would pick out the gilt lettering on Winifred's books and wink from the wax berries on top of the bureau. Colour would deepen in the hot-house roses and the forced hyacinths that were ranged along the top of the bookshelves. And Winifred would smile at her as intimately and kindly as she had smiled at that young woman who had brushed by them in the hall those many months ago. And Jean would sit on the hearthrug at Winifred's feet, and talk naturally. As if she were talking to the ideal mother who haunts the imagination of the child in us all. It would be quite easy to talk to Winifred then. . . .

"Things are just the same," said Jean, shivering a little while the dream faded, and locking her fingers together until the knuckles were sharply angular beneath the flaking and transparent skin.

"Is your husband leaving you alone still?" The usual euphemism.

"Yes. At least—that is—most of the time." But she did not want to talk of Carey.

"Well," said Winifred cheerfully. "Nothing can be as bad again as it has been lately. The children are growing up, and

when they're all three at school you'll be able to get more rest. Then you'll be glad of your husband's company."

"That will be worse," said Jean emphatically. She pulled her brown cardigan closer to her throat. She was wearing her best clothes for Winifred's benefit, but as usual felt bargain-basement and looked it. Even the Persian lamb coat, narrowly folded beside Winifred's squirrel cape which was flung anyhow over the back of the sofa, failed to comfort her. It had angered Winifred, and she could not wear it to Harley Street again.

"I think," said Winifred, lifting her eyebrows and speaking with some seriousness, "you fail to appreciate the good things you *have* got. You have a nice house, and three children, and a husband who loves and adores you."

"Yes, I know," assented Jean hopelessly.

"In fact, you are a very lucky woman," Winifred told her abruptly.

"Yes, I know that. Yes, of course. Well, I wouldn't be without the children for the world. Of course." Jean felt she could not agree more.

Yet when she reached home there would be dust and crumbs all over the furniture, toys scattered pell-mell, and a sink-full of washing-up from lunch and tea. There would be a pail of nappies to run through before she could start to think of supper. The children's supper, the ironing, the airing, the mending, the composing of quarrels—she would be working till midnight, and then Carey would get into bed beside her and begin one of his unending arguments. She would sleep badly, and when Hugh woke her for his six-o'clock feed in the chill darkness of the January morning she would be heavy-eyed, dispirited and duller than ever. Jean moved unhappily beneath the rug, and tried to think of something outside her own dreary concerns which would amuse and interest her doctor. And immediately she remembered Lydia.

"Miss Bentley came to tea last week."

"Miss *Bentley*?" Winifred's chin came up sharply and she bent on Jean more scrutiny than she had hitherto found necessary.

"Yes, I hoped you wouldn't mind," went on Jean more

confidently. "We met—oh, it must be some months ago—in the waiting-room." She rolled over on the pillow, determined on candour, and added with some curiosity: "She's very sweet, isn't she? We got talking and she told me she lived in Croydon once. When she was a child. I don't think she liked it much. But I asked her to come in for a cup of tea if she ever came our way, and she said she'd love to. And last week she came."

"Don't you think," drawled Winifred, "that was a little gushing of her? And not very considerate to you when you're so busy?"

"Oh, I didn't mind for myself," Jean assured her. For Lydia's visit had oddly pleased her. She would have welcomed any patient of Dr. Orwin's, but Lydia had expressed delight in the children and knew how to talk to them. More, she had seated herself at the piano and played songs and dances like a professional. The children had lost their shyness and soon they were all singing together. Just as if the wireless had come to life, as the boys told her afterwards. They begged her to come again. "She's as good as any professional, isn't she?" said Jean artlessly.

"Hardly that." Winifred felt she could afford to be indulgent. In Jean's circle the most mediocre talent would no doubt appear distinguished. "However, her music is a pleasant hobby."

"I'm so glad she came," went on Jean, relieved, she did not know why, of a sense of guilt. "I was sure you wouldn't mind."

"Mind?" repeated Winifred with some contempt. "Oh no. Why should I? Though for your own sake, Mrs. Martin, I must advise you that it is unwise for patients to discuss their treatment." She smiled slightly. "And Miss Bentley—I am telling you this for your own good—I do not care to discuss my patients—Miss Bentley is a very sick person."

"Is she?" asked Jean, impressed. "Well, I think it's very courageous of her to go in for B.B.C. auditions. Don't you?"

"But she has yet to achieve one." Winifred hid her astonishment. Obviously Lydia had been shooting a line, secure in Jean's ignorance and provincialism. "People with her com-

plaint do a lot of talking," she informed Jean. "But they don't always carry their plans through. They're inclined to peter out before the job's half done, you know."

"I see," said Jean doubtfully. "But I couldn't very well stop being friends with her now. I mean—well, she seems to like coming to see us. She's rather lonely, isn't she?"

"I don't think so," said Winifred coolly. "She has other friends without imposing herself on you."

"Yes, I expect she has," Jean hastened to agree. "But it's funny. People seem to like coming to our house. I don't know why. We're nearly always in a muddle. The children see to that. You can't keep a house tidy for visitors when you've got small boys playing about in it. But we do get a lot of visitors in spite of everything. You knew, didn't you," she went on rather nervously, bent on a complete confession now that she had gone so far, "that Miss Lawrence called on us once? That was back in the autumn, though."

"Miss Lawrence?" This time there was no mistaking the anger in Winifred's voice. It whipped across the raw sensitivity of her patient like glass and ice. Maisie Lawrence and Jean! What could Jean give that she, Winifred, had not already given and that should have been enough? And why had Maisie said nothing of her visit to Winifred but left her to find out by the chance remark of this little fool and outsider? "You had better tell me about it," she said distantly, and lowered her eyes to conceal their anger.

"She called quite by chance," explained Jean naïvely. "You see, I met her in the waiting-room too." She did not point out that a new patient had somehow been 'squeezed in' between Lydia and herself, that she had been kept waiting three quarters of an hour for her own appointment, and that Maisie had arrived early. One could not explain to Dr. Orwin how deeply they all resented the capriciousness of her time-table. It was natural, thought Jean, that she and Miss Lawrence should have tried to forget the time with a little conversation. And Miss Lawrence was such a fascinating person. Timidly Jean tried to convey this to the pinched and gleaming mask which confronted her when Winifred finally raised her head.

Winifred took a grip on herself. "Oh well——" she said at last, and shrugged her shoulders. For what was the use of showing this little fool how angry one could feel at so much treachery, such needless confusion? "You know my views now about patients talking. It's entirely up to you what you do, Mrs. Martin. I can only advise you to leave other patients alone and concentrate on your own cure."

The colour that had drained from Jean's broad cheek-bones slowly surged back and throbbed beneath her jaw and in the hollows of her cheeks. It was dreadful how, whatever she said, she always managed to offend Dr. Orwin. Her eyelids felt stiff as if she had been weeping. But she made one more effort to explain how natural it all was. "You can't very well just turn people away if they choose to come to your door."

"You could do it quite easily," retorted Winifred, and closed her note-book and stood up. "All you need is to be coldly polite. Just tell them you're busy, or that you're going out."

Accepting her dismissal, Jean murmured: "But I should find that very difficult. I'm not good at doing that sort of thing." She swung her feet off the couch, and indeed, although she hated the end of her sessions which came round so quickly, she was glad of the opportunity to hide her hot face from Winifred. She folded the grey rug into exact halves and laid it ready for the next patient.

"And by the way," said Winifred quietly, "I've been thinking about that dream you brought me. As you find it so difficult to talk to me—and you're altogether so afraid of dependence—and are quite obviously not prepared yet to co-operate in your own cure—I think we had better not make any more weekly appointments. Of course, if you want to see me at any time in the future, you can phone me. Meanwhile——" She crossed to the bureau and tossed the note-book carelessly into a drawer—"we will let things slide."

"But I don't want to do that," said Jean in a low voice. The tears that were heavy already behind her eyes gathered uncontrollably, and she stood, feeling anguished and too tall before Winifred's accusing eyes. "You tell me," she went on miser-

ably, "that I'm afraid of dependence. But it's *you* who are dismissing me."

"On the contrary," said Winifred with cool surprise, "if you want to come, of course you can. You can come as often as you like—provided it can be fitted into a time-table. I am always very busy."

To this Jean made no reply, for despair deprived her of words. She had explained to Winifred once—back in the autumn it was—that she felt like a school-girl again. Pushed back against her will into childhood, and with all the child's uncomfortable feelings. Above all, she wanted to know she was wanted. To be told so, and to be sure that the relationship between them had some reality; that it gave some pleasure on both sides. But Winifred steadily refused to give her that assurance. Against the barrier of Winifred's detachment Jean was to continue to expose her childish, defenceless confidences. It was a torturing situation, from which nothing but disaster could be expected. If only—but it was too late now to do anything about that—she had refused to come when Carey first made the suggestion. But then, if she had refused, Carey would have walked out on her, and that would have been the end of her marriage. She could see no solution of the dilemma. . . .

XX

"I'M SORRY there was a muddle about your appointment," said Winifred courteously, while Lydia unwound her woolly scarf and laid her small black coat on the sofa.

"That's all right," said Lydia dully, without looking up. It was now past twelve, and she had been sitting in the waiting-room below for over an hour. At eleven, when her appointment was due, the door had opened to admit, not Winifred, but a dim and consequential old lady, almost obscured by a swathing of furs, who had sat with her feet on the fender and

her skirt drawn up to display calves so thin that her stockings hung in vertical folds. The old lady had fussed because Dr. Orwin was unpunctual, and her health was not equal to the strain of waiting. She had come for eleven o'clock and she wished to be seen at eleven o'clock. "But *my* appointment was for eleven," Lydia told her, startled. They were facing each other across the fireplace, and above them the gilt clock, in its marble temple, ticked away the minutes to eleven-fifteen.

"Oh, I don't think so," said the old lady decidedly. "I rang up Dr. Orwin yesterday, and she definitely said to-morrow at eleven." She dug into her bag and brought out her diary. "Look for yourself and make sure," she begged. "My memory is not as good as it used to be before I had my breakdown." She pushed the little book into Lydia's unwilling hands.

"Yes, it's booked all right," acknowledged Lydia doubtfully. "But my appointment was made last week. I always come on Mondays at eleven. It's a special arrangement with my office." She handed the book back and they sat on in a slightly hostile silence.

The old lady broke it to say: "I hope, my dear, if there's been a mistake, that you'll allow me to go in first. I'm not at all well, you know. If it weren't for Dr. Orwin, I'm sure I wouldn't be alive at all. She's so marvellous, isn't she? All my friends say: 'If it weren't for that wonderful doctor of yours, we really don't know what would become of you.' Her kindness! No one else understands me like she does. My nature is so terribly sensitive."

"It's a bit difficult," Lydia hesitated. "If I stay too long here, I shall miss my lunch hour——"

"Dear, dear," interrupted the old lady, concerned. "I'm very sorry about that. Very sorry indeed. But it's just as difficult for me too. My chauffeur will be here again at twelve, and I simply daren't keep him waiting. My husband is sure to need him for the lunch hour." The wrinkled face, pale in the January daylight that filtered down from the narrow sky above Harley Street, peered anxiously at Lydia's small, troubled profile.

• "I don't suppose," Lydia said, looking up from the fire and

smiling a little, "we shall have any choice. Dr. Orwin will choose for us."

A few moments later they heard the front door close, and Winifred was standing in the doorway. "Come along, Lady Holleston," she said cheerfully, and flashed an intimate, friendly smile at Lydia behind the old lady's back. Lady Hollerton collected her furs and stumbled out into the white light of the domed hall, and Winifred whispered to Lydia: "I shan't be long. Not more than twenty minutes." Then Lydia was left alone with the mahogany sideboard, the Turkey red carpet, and the scarlet and white magazines spaced out in neat rectangles on the mirroring surface of the immense dining-table. It was not the first time that her appointment had been given to another and more important patient. . . .

"You always seem to dream that there's no place for you—that nobody wants you," remarked Winifred to Lydia politely, nearly an hour later.

The dream which she had just read was both explicit and typical of the pattern into which Lydia's dreams had fallen during the last months.

'I tried to get a bus from the City to come to Harley Street, but although I queued for a long time at the stop, my turn never came. So I started to walk. An empty bus passed me on the road, and while I was watching two women got into it. One of them said to me: "The more you try, the worse off you are." I became very hungry, but there was nothing to eat at any of the restaurants. At length I found a shop where they sold plates of fish. But when I asked for some, the waiter brought me a dish of red peppers instead. He said to me: "Why don't you go home?" I told him my stepmother had taken the roof off the house.'

Lydia said nothing. Her pale cheek was pressed against the pillow and she was looking away from Winifred towards the bookshelf, above which the roses, crutched by invisible wire, warmed the colourless wall like springing flames from a brazier. She was wearing a dark sweater over her office-frock, and

pressing her cold fingers together to stop their trembling. 'Sullen, because I gave away her appointment, I suppose,' concluded Winifred and suppressed a sigh. Nothing tired her so much as a patient who refused to talk. She was still feeling the hangover from her session with Jean, which nearly an hour of Lady Hollerton had done little to dissipate, and was waiting for an opportunity to drive a wedge between Jean and Lydia. No good ever came of patients talking together.

Seeing Lydia's pleasure in the roses, Winifred said quickly: "Are you one of those people who like wearing a flower in your buttonhole, or do you simply loathe the things?"

"I like them," faltered Lydia, and lifted blue eyes, brilliant with fatigue, to the doctor's face.

"I'll give you one of these, then," suggested Winifred, crossing to the bowl of roses and exploring with her finger-tips among the wired stems. She chose the largest rose and wrapped it in a cone of its own leaves. "Wait a minute. I've got a pin under my lapel. I always carry a few in case. There," she said, giving the flower into Lydia's hands, "they are rather lovely, aren't they?"

A wave of feeling swept over Lydia's pale, small features. "It's perfect," she said breathlessly, and curved the palm of her hand lingeringly over the bloomy surface. "Roses like this in January," she marvelled. "And so fresh, like the earliest outdoor roses of April. Where did they come from?"

"They were the gift of a patient," Winifred told her carelessly. "She gave me the hyacinths too——" She nodded to the tapering hyacinth candles, rounded and blue, that flanked the roses. "She grows them for me in the autumn, and brings along the bowls as soon as they begin to bud. Nice, aren't they?"

"Very," said Lydia sadly. It had not occurred to her that Winifred would expect flowers. Shocked at her own egoism, she felt she had much for which to apologise: her empty hands, and the miserable quality of her dreams. She said quickly: "I'm sorry my dreams have been so full of worry. I'm sleeping so badly these days, and I get terribly depressed. I wish I needn't inflict them on you."

"Suppose you tell me about them." Winifred drew a low chair close to the fender and held her hand out to the gas fire. Beyond the window the tall terraces of Harley Street presented a blank façade to the few pedestrians hurrying past, heads bent before the north-east wind. The sky, heavy with unfallen snow, lay like a dirty yellow ceiling over the high roof-tops. A present of a buttonhole cost nothing, reflected Winifred, and it never failed to draw them out. She could have stocked a florist's shop with all the flowers her patients brought her.

"I didn't feel so depressed when I first came to you," Lydia defended herself. "The dreams were quite short and ordinary too, weren't they?" She tried to read the doctor's expression, but she was too short-sighted and Winifred remained a green blur against the marble fireplace.

Winifred flipped over the handwritten sheets. "They're all concerned with finding a home, or getting food. I wonder why you find it so difficult to come to me? You seemed to talk to me easily enough when you first started."

Lydia was silent. She wanted to say how her whole week was a desert between one Monday and the next, how she came to her sessions with the breathless excitement of a starving child to a party, and how, as soon as she lay on the couch opposite Winifred, words curled off her mind like vapour. But between the need for tact and her respect for truth, she could not begin to explain her predicament.

"Well, we'll let the first dream go, then," said Winifred with a faint shrug. "The next one seems to be quite interesting. Perhaps you'll find it easier to talk about that. Interrupt me if there's any point you wish to make clear.

"I was a music teacher at the Royal College. There was one girl who held the class back because she was hostile and questioned everything I said. I took her into the garden and let her ask me a lot of questions. Her name was Queenie. I knew I must give her affection and endless patience if I wanted to teach her anything. And it was essential I should

always tell her the truth. She became gentle and friendly, and learnt all I could teach her.'

"What is the purpose of this dream? Who is the teacher, and who is Queenie?"

"I had a dream about the Royal College when I first came to you. It's natural," said Lydia evasively, "that I should dream about schools, don't you think? Seeing I taught in them for quite a long time?"

"But this dream——" Winifred tapped it with her pen—"is a definite situation. There are the two people—the elder and the younger. The elder woman seems to take charge of Queenie and explain life to her. Does that correspond to anything in your own life?"

She looked across to Lydia, eyebrows lifted quizzically, and awaited a reply. Lydia's face, oval, with cheek-bones a little flattened, so that her eye-sockets were too prominent, wore a look of suffering. Meeting Winifred's expression of impersonal curiosity, Lydia dropped her eyelids and turned her dark head on the pillow so that Winifred could see nothing but a white cheek and the soft fall of dark hair, leaving exposed the delicate curve of bone from ear to jaw and the small, quickly pulsating throat. Seen thus in profile she was a stranger to Winifred, and in her abstraction appeared aloof and ageless. Confronted by such a look of solitude and suffering, Winifred could only feel resentfully materialistic, solid, and irrevocably fifty-three. "Well, Miss Bentley——?"

"No, I can't think of anything," said Lydia faintly, as if the subject were closed between them. "Queenie," she added, opening her eyes widely and looking again at Winifred, "was the name of a girl who was at school with me. She was rather clever and interesting." Her eyes left Winifred's face, white and a little stern, and wandered to the tall windows opposite through which she could see the skyline of Harley Street, forbidding against the wintry sky. Queenie, she wanted to say, was not like me. She wrote a book or two, which only a few discerning critics could understand, and travelled a little, and then seemed to have disappeared and one would never hear of

her again. But now she's a famous woman. You'd know her name if I told you. . . . But perhaps it's foolish to talk of things that one wants to do before they're achieved. *People often return in middle life to some passing ambition of youth. It's a common thing. But it's dangerous. It belongs to fantasy.*

But supposing there should be an exception? Supposing that it were possible to liberate some creative energy that life—all these years—had stifled? Lydia flexed her long fingers, through which she could feel, insistently and urgently, the shape of some melody, some rhythm below the level of consciousness, forcing upward for her attention. She had been familiar with this uncomfortable state in the old days before her lover had died. But the melody never came true. Some falsity, some insincerity, blurred the bright outline, and when she sat down to compose music the result was an overstatement, a morbid exaggeration or an artificial gaiety. But the urge still remained. All those years, while she listened attentively to her pupils, or sat before her typewriter, or pushed her way with the rest through crowded Tubes or teashops, or lay awake at night in her attic room in the boarding-house, she had scarcely known how profoundly dissatisfied she was because the melody remained inarticulate. But now, shaken by her love for Winifred, almost she felt she could write it at last. Almost the melody was coming true, and this time, for life itself had taught her there are no miracles, she would be able to write it with sincerity. She wanted to tell Winifred how grateful she was for making this possible.

But Winifred, straight-backed on the low chair near the fire, had grown weary of symbolism. She had breakfasted early on toast and coffee, it was nearly lunch-time, and her stomach quite ached with emptiness. There were still a number of dreams to get through, so, if Lydia could offer no further help, she decided to interpret them herself.

"I think the two women may represent the two sides of yourself." This was a safe explanation and went down well with patients as a rule. It flattered them to be called complex. "You are turning over your philosophy of life—refurbishing it, as it were. Every time you come over to see me, you learn to

see yourself a little more distinctly. You are learning to understand yourself. And then you go home and the process begins again."

"But what about the music-room?" stammered Lydia reproachfully. The interpretation of her dream was so wildly off the mark that she half suspected Winifred of disingenuousness.

"Music has always been your hobby," said Winifred kindly. She did not specifically define the second-rate jobs in second-rate schools which were Lydia's only serious claim to consideration as an artist.

"But I told you. At least the dreams tell you——" Lydia shifted nervously on the couch. Dr. Orwin had wanted to be a musician too. Surely she would understand how important it was that one should attempt, if only once in a lifetime, to create, from the miseries and confusions of experience, some perfect thing. The dream, so obviously a blueprint of her relationship with Winifred, asked for the affection, patience and truth which should enable her to clarify her mind, with Winifred's help, of insincerities, and get busy on some constructive work.

"I think," she said, greatly daring, "that Queenie represents myself, and you are the teacher." Her eyes flickered for a moment and met Winifred's hard and penetrating stare. Above the firm-fleshed body and straight shoulders Winifred's face showed worn and clear-cut, the skin hollow under her cheekbones, her mouth a thin line of rouge, too crimson against her cold cheeks and the almost colourless blue of her eyes. "I want you to like me," Lydia continued, with the recklessness born of her fear that she had nothing to lose. She cupped her hands round the rose which she had pinned to her jersey. "I want you to be patient with me. I know I sometimes find it difficult to talk. But I do try very hard, and I do write out all the dreams so that you can see them every week. And I want you always to tell me the truth when I ask you questions. I'm not afraid," she smiled a little nervously, feeling beneath the bloomy surface of the rose its core of solidity, "of the truth. But, most of all, I want you to like me. I can't," she faltered,

looking a little wildly round the room, "talk to you unless I really feel you like me. . . . I'm sorry to talk like this. But you did ask me what the dream meant. I'm sure that's what it is. You're the teacher in it who answers all the questions. And I'm the girl, Queenie, who's not easy to deal with at first, but who responds to affection and wants to learn."

"I see." Winifred's tone was non-committal. It was, as she had suspected at first, a homosexual dream after all. (Her stomach would cave in, she thought, if she didn't soon get some lunch.) A queen. . . . But how could one deal with so important and delicate a subject as homosexuality when one's mind had already travelled to the next appointment. At five minutes to one there was no time for finesse.

Raising her head and looking full at the patient, Winifred said bluntly: "Like and dislike have nothing to do with it, Miss Bentley. They don't come into it. As for telling you the truth, I always do this with all my patients. I have never deceived you. In your own case, you have, I think, failed to obtain from your work the satisfaction that is available to you, because you have not settled the conflict between your early ambitions and the work that actually offered itself to you. We can't all be artists, just as we can't all be wives and mothers. Nevertheless," said Winifred, indicating with a slight movement of her hand the physical background of her own successes, "we can all have a happy life. I," she added firmly, "have had a *very* happy life. But I have learnt to adjust myself to the circumstances that actually presented themselves to me."

"Still," countered Lydia, turning her white face to Winifred and speaking with difficulty. "it doesn't seem right to have a talent—a gift—an interest, if you like—and never use it."

"Gift?" said Winifred brutally. "You mean a taste for music?"

"The piano—I wanted to compose music for the piano." Tears glittered in Lydia's eyes. "Ideas keep coming to me. Even now I feel I could do something. . . . If I could only write what I feel is there——" Torn manuscript littered her bedroom, but the phrases, if they would only coalesce, would amount to something.

"And do you think you could earn your living by it?" Winifred's high clear voice drove a surgical knife through her patient's grandiose fantasies. It was kinder that way.

"Perhaps not." Lydia's voice was muffled.

"So you see," Winifred told her pleasantly, "you have been worrying yourself, and making all this fuss inside you for nothing." She closed her note-book and the interview in a single gesture of finality. "I think," she added, as she crossed to the sofa and handed Lydia her small, black coat, "when you accept your limitations, Miss Bentley, you will find you can use your hands normally again. There's nothing actually wrong with them, except a slight rheumatic swelling of the joints. Not enough to stop you working." She waited, her hand on the door-knob, curbing her impatience to be gone.

"Perhaps you're right," said Lydia humbly. She knotted her woolly scarf and pulled her gloves on. Her face, shadowed by the fall of dark hair, was drawn and listless.

"All the same," she reiterated in a dull, hopeless tone, holding out her hand (which Winifred ignored) to say good-bye, "I was quite good once, you know. My music-master, Stewart Lockwood, told me I'd never be any good at anything else. I ought not to have disappointed him. But, of course, it's all in the past. As you say. There's not much I can do about it now."

She went away quietly, not knowing that Winifred was staring after her, with horror in her eyes. . . .

Winifred had seen the outstretched hand all right, but could not bring herself to touch it. Stewart Lockwood——! This woman had been the protégée of Stewart Lockwood, and now was unable to hold down a typist's job without the assistance of a psychiatrist!

Winifred hurried back into the consulting-room and flicked over the pages of Lydia's case-notes until she found the right sheet. There the episode of Lydia's concert was plainly to be read, with only the names missing. And, before that, the scrawled notes which she had taken down in Lydia's own words. Pieced together from the first two or three interviews,

the grey mass of strokes and loops moved into a coherent shape under the ache and pressure of reality. Colour and depth were added to them. Lydia was no longer a case, but a person.

She wondered how she could ever have thought this Bentley woman attractive. Lydia was *not* attractive. She was downright ugly, with that sullen underlip and heavy, resentful eyes. To go through life with a grievance played havoc with a woman's looks. And by what right could Lydia feel aggrieved at her lot? She had been quite out of the ordinarily lucky. Stewart Lockwood had trained her as a musician, and she had experienced the ecstasy and idealism of youthful love. Winifred's lips were compressed to a narrow line, her eyes pale like steel, and as cold, for astonishment drained her of sympathy. Patients! With half their opportunities and often half their ability, she was of more consequence than the lot of them put together! And she deserved her success, for it was the reward of tenacity, grit, work, endurance. . . . Glove paralysis indeed! It was a case of downright malingering.

For it was Stewart Lockwood who had given Winifred her one and only audition for the piano, after six months of intensive coaching by Miss Ledbury, and sent her home with gusty laughter blowing in her ears and brutal home-truths slashing at the barricades of her precarious pride. She had spoken truly when she told Lydia that 'failure—or rather the courageous acceptance of failure—can be the turning-point of one's life. . . .'

The Rev. Theodore accompanied his daughter to London for the great occasion. They stayed overnight at a quiet hotel in Bloomsbury, and in the morning took the Tube to Notting Hill Gate and climbed the steep ascent of Campden Hill Square, at the top end of which Stewart Lockwood had a house and a studio. Winifred and her father were both puffing a little when they finished this climb, but they agreed that the view from the terrace of old houses was well worth the effort. As they were quite half an hour too early for their appointment, they explored some of the streets south of the terrace

and discovered a country town inset into West London. Winifred, who was expecting to find in Stewart Lockwood a thin, slight, Shelleyesque figure, with blowing hair and a look of suffering spirituality, was delighted with the appropriateness of his surroundings.

They returned to the Square, climbed the crumbling stone steps of the house, and swung the lion's-head brass knocker on the gleaming, black door. A pretty parlourmaid let them in and preceded them to the music studio on the first floor. This room, originally the drawing-room of the house and very long, was now almost bare of furniture except for the Steinway Grand, and had bare, painted walls instead of the flowered wall-papers to which Winifred was accustomed. The rector, seeing that no chair was provided for visitors, then suggested that he ought perhaps to wait for his daughter outside, and the little parlourmaid seemed to accept this arrangement with considerable relief.

The closing of the front door behind the rector's back galvanised the house. A door opened noisily somewhere at the back, and a huge, bearlike figure came shambling and stumbling along the passage and thudded into the music-room, where it came to a standstill by the window and turned slowly to stare at the cornice several feet above Winifred's head. She glanced up at it timidly. The indifferent London sunlight, unsubdued by curtains, streamed round Stewart's figure, which appeared in silhouette like a vast cone. His bald and bullet-shaped head grew out of sloping rolls of fat where once a neck had been. Long, ape-like arms reached back and joined beneath his coat-tails. He wore no waistcoat, and the monstrous expanse of pale shirt and trousered paunch that protruded at Winifred made her modestly avert her eyes. Standing with his short, fat legs widely apart and his brandy-balls of eyes rolled upward, his unlikeness to Winifred's pre-conception of a professional musician filled her with alarm. Here was no Shelley. The creature was not even civilised. When he opened his mouth to speak to her, she shrank back, expecting to be blasted from the room.

But again he surprised her. The voice that issued from that

monstrous gullet was curiously high-pitched, hectoring, even old-maidish. It startled Winifred, making her fingers clumsy. The sheets of music which she was arranging on the piano slithered about and one sheet disappeared below the pedals. She dived after it, and caught her head a numbing crack below the keyboard as she bounced up again. The bare room, empty except for the Steinway Grand with its lovely lines curving away towards the daylight of the window, washed up and down around her like a sea mirroring the sun. She sat down at the piano, her cheeks burning, tears of mortification rising in her eyes. From beneath his fringe of wiry brows Stewart appeared to notice nothing. "Why don't you begin?" he asked impatiently. She waited a moment, till the black and white rectangles stopped bobbing up and down, then laid her fingers on the keys. There was nothing, she told herself, to be afraid of. "Don't think of him at all," Miss Ledbury had advised her. "Imagine that you're at home in your own drawing-room, playing for your own pleasure. Forget this is an audition." It was easy to talk like that back home at the rectory.

She had chosen the A Minor Sonata of Mozart to play first. It called for precise and faultless technique, but she was not particularly worried at her technical inefficiencies. She was, after all, not a pianist yet, but merely a would-be pupil. If the great Mr. Lockwood would only listen to her, she felt confident he would recognise her promise. Miss Ledbury had assured her that he was the best teacher in London, and that only the best was good enough. As for technique, that would come later.

The Mozart was to be followed by the Sonata in A of Schubert and the Valse in C Sharp Minor of Chopin. The choice, Miss Ledbury had advised her, was an ambitious one. She would have to practise very hard indeed, and not lose her head on the day through excitement, or try to get by with any tricks of sentimentality or over-emphasis. Confronted by the terrifying Mr. Lockwood at the window, she felt that Miss Ledbury had not overstated the need for caution. "Your performance at this test," Miss Ledbury had told her, "will

be as much a test of your character as of your musical abilities. Mr. Lockwood has no use for people who are not in earnest."

Winifred needed all her character now. She was alone in a bare and ugly room with a monster blocking the light, whose only movement was an abrupt vibration of the lips. When he did this, she recoiled as if a clap of thunder had burst above them. But all he said, in his unexpected, querulous falsetto, was: "Well, why don't you begin?"

She propped the Mozart on the music rest and squeezed her fingers together hard. The pain of this released some nervous rigidity, and she looked up at him with more confidence. Between them his image lay framed in light along the harp-shaped mirror of the piano lid. Shining walls enclosed them in an intimacy that was without warmth. The walls were buff down to four feet of the ground; below that, green. There was a polished parquet floor.

"I chose the Sonata in A Minor of Mozart."

Grudgingly he moved his cone-shaped head. Small, blood-shot eyes glared at her above sagging wads of flesh. "Mozart?" The voice was a thin, high whine. "Needs damn good playing."

The contrast between his repulsive appearance (his clothes were none too clean) and the high, old-maidish voice fascinated Winifred. She stared at him and added slowly: "I've brought the Sonata in A of Schubert and the Chopin Waltz in C Sharp Minor——"

His angry eyes took in her air of uncertainty, her school-girl frock of navy blue with narrow white pipings, and her low-heeled, sensible shoes. He said gruffly: "You young girls are all the same—stuffed with a lot of romantic nonsense. I'll hear the Chopin first."

Not knowing whether to feel relieved, Winifred picked out the Chopin from her case on the floor. Technique, in the merciless light of this London room, was beginning to assume a frightening importance. The Chopin was not at all easy to play. The first page, slipping along legato with the right hand, and keeping the rhythm delicately with the staccato of the left, was not too difficult, provided she did not come to grief with the chromatic notes. But with the acceleration on the top of

page two, she would need all her control to keep her hands from flying apart. Her mind, anxiously several bars ahead, would have alit on top C Sharp while her right hand was starting the climb two octaves below. But the treacherous left hand, toiling after, was apt to alternate between unseemly thumps or misses altogether. "Don't lose your head;" Miss Ledbury had advised her, "and don't try for cheap effects." How cheap was advice! She would be lucky, Winifred told herself grimly, if she played the right notes, let alone the 'effects'. No ordeal in all her young life had been so terrible as this. She laid her fingers on the keys and began to play.

And everything went wrong. Never, never in her life had she played so badly as she now played with the terrible Mr. Lockwood giving her his entire attention. Whether it was because of the bare room, or merely a general nervousness and apprehension about the result for her future, or—possibly—the merest unacknowledged perception that art was not indeed the sphere in which she could hope to find for herself an honourable place—whether for one or all these reasons, Winifred lost her head, played too fast, forgot the composition of the whole in her agonised absorption with each phrase, even each bar, and then turned over two pages at once, tried to turn back one, and found herself at the end again. Fumbling with stiff fingers, the sweat beading her lip, her cheeks grew paler and her body so rigid that at the end she hardly breathed. The eyes which, distraught, she at length lifted to the mountainous and silent figure, socketed idol-wise in the window, were colourless like skim milk. She knew it was all over with her music before Stewart Lockwood's loose and violet lips parted to tell her so. Her career was finished, *kaput*, strangled at birth, before she was to be given the chance to show what she could do. It only remained for Stewart to read the burial service.

"Can you," asked Stewart Lockwood, after an eternity in which every separate beat of her throbbing pulses was an isolated event, unrelated to the normal rhythm in which blood and the instant alike are absorbed in event, "cook an omelette properly?"

"I beg your pardon," stammered Winifred, wondering if her atrocious performance had driven the great man out of his senses. He looked mad enough anyway, and nothing would have surprised her less than to see him rocket off the edge. The Sixth Form had read *Absalom and Achitophel* as a set book for Higher Certificate the previous year. *Great wits are sure to madness near allied*, etc. She knew her Dryden, and felt a little comforted that her worldly wisdom should return in this crisis to cushion her against further shock.

"I said," enunciated Stewart more clearly, "can you cook an omelette?"

"An omelette?" she repeated, and glanced for help to her music, but the sheets, barricading her from the harp-like surface of the enormous Steinway, confronted her bewilderment with a blank answer. "Did you say omelette?"

"I said omelette." Stewart withdrew his gaze from the cornice and rolled his brandy-balls of eyes towards the music-stool. Had he been less unperceptive, he might have chosen a kinder frame of words to convey to her drooped and despairing figure the judgment that it was his duty to tell her. But he was too indifferent to pay any attention. Brutal and undeviating, he had just one passion—music. For those who trespassed on this golden and silver territory he kept one special brand of rudeness in reserve. Snobs of all kinds he hated, and those who would attempt to use music to gain other and personal ends. To him, Winifred was just a mess to be got rid of as quickly as possible. Insolently his ironic eyes travelled from her shoes to the smooth, red plaits that swung, schoolgirl-fashion, over her mature young breasts. He opened his mouth and said suavely: "I am wondering what you *can* do. Perhaps you can cook?"

"Is it so important?" murmured Winifred. Her fingers still lay on the C Sharp Minor chord, but her right foot jerked nervously, depressing the pedal, and breaking the soft hum of the resolved cadence. She did not look at her persecutor.

"Important? Of course it's important." He took a step forward and glared at her across the shining surface of the Steinway. He went on seriously: "The art of cooking is the

oldest æsthetic enjoyment known to man. You can discount the legend of the burnt pig. Civilisation was not made hazardous. You can discount Prometheus. Though——” he skewered at her a podgy forefinger——“you’ll ignore the Greeks at your peril. But don’t,” he said severely, “neglect the art of gastronomy. It preceded you, young woman, by a few hundred thousand years. And it’ll still be important when you and this——rubbish——” a flicker of his heavy lids consigned her performance and with it her entire artistic future into a limbo beneath contempt——“are as dead as Dido.”

“I’m no good, then.” Drooping on the piano-stool, Winifred turned up her hands as though to trace this calamity in her palms, but seeing instead only the lemony light that fell across the chancel when Dorothy sang ‘The King of Love,’ and the caress of light on Dorothy’s pale curls and tender, childish throat.

Frowning at her, Stewart demanded: “What do you do it for?”

Winifred shook her head and was silent. A tear scalded down the side of her nose and dropped on to her open palm. She watched it incuriously as it lay, an unbroken bubble, between two creases of skin. A few more tears followed, and then a copious flow that thickened in her nose and set her digging frantically up her knicker leg for a handkerchief.

Watching her scrape it into her eyes, Stewart said with sudden compunction: “There’s nothing to cry for, child.”

“No—I know.” A sob broke in her throat.

Lumbering across the room, he propped his huge bulk against the Steinway and thrust his hands into his trouser pockets. Above the paunch, his chins came to rest on his shirt-front. His fierce little eyes took in her sturdy neck, dropped in defeat, her total lack of waistline, her too-short legs, and her air of innocent vulnerability, suggesting (he grinned to himself suddenly) the most prosaic things: woolly combinations, for instance, or porridge for breakfast.

“Look here,” he urged her more gently. “You don’t need to take any notice of what I said just now. I’m a brute and a boor. Surely you’ve heard that much of me. It’s common

knowledge." His shoulders heaved with what for Stewart was a laugh. "Look up now. Look at me for a minute. Put that handkerchief away."

She glanced up, fascinated by the heavy lips that protruded at her in an attempt to be ingratiating.

"That's better," said Stewart. "Now then. What was it you came to me to-day to hear? That I should tell you to go ahead and give up everything for the piano? Take you as a pupil? Charge your father fees? Make a nice income out of you, I dessay? And then? And then what?" He shook his bald head slowly, and drew his heavy brows down until his eyes almost disappeared between rolls of fat. Then opening them, he thrust his face to within a few inches of hers and rapped out: "*Nothing. Nothing at all.*" He flapped a hand against her Chopin, still propped up on the ledge. "Conscientiousness? Possibly. Ambition? Plenty, no doubt. Oh yes, you may have all that. But the one thing that matters——? You're not even a starter, my dear." He put a hand on her shoulder and shook it to engage still more closely her attention. "I haven't got the damned dishonesty to pretend you're good when you're not. I'll tell you what are you. Shall I tell you why you're here? Because you're a snob. And someone's told you it's smart to become a musician. Do you know the definition of a snob, by the way?" She shook her head dumbly. "It's one who likes fine things for the wrong reason. It's a would-be musician who has neither the mathematics nor the sensibility. Don't you be one of them. Have the courage to be yourself. Find something you *can* do. And do it well. And you might do a lot worse than learn to cook. I meant what I said just now about omelettes. Give me your case."

She bit her lip to stop its trembling. With rough kindness he put away her music for her, and still holding forth about cookery led her to the door. But just as she was going, he suddenly gave his thigh a mighty whack and yelled: "Wait a moment. If you've got nothing better to do to-night, you might as well roll along to the Aeolian Hall and hear one of my pupils giving a first concert. Good Lord, fancy my forgetting!"

She came back a step into the room and watched him turn from his pockets an extraordinary jumble of objects—old theatre tickets, bits of string, old letters and stubs of broken pencil. At last he found what he wanted. A crackling white strip of paper.

"There," he said, handing her a ticket. "There you are now. If you want to hear a real artist, come and listen to my little Lydia Bentley. Sixteen, and plays like an angel. You'll know," he said, patting her comfortingly on the arm, "just what it is you haven't got if you turn up to-night and listen to *her*."

Winifred mumbled her thanks and turned to go.

"No, you're not grateful to me at all," he grinned to her departing back. "You think I'm a hateful old man. Not yet you're grateful. But you will be one day if you remember what I said, and have the courage to be yourself——"

No one, thought Winifred, as she dropped Lydia's case-book into the drawer, and picked up from the sofa her toque with its swathing of ribbons, could ever say that she had faced life without courage and common sense.* And that was why she had risen to Harley Street, while this Bentley woman typed her life away in a two-by-four City office. . . .

XXI

"I ADORE THE view from here," said Maisie to Winifred, later that same Monday, after her appointment at Harley Street was concluded. "Even at dusk, when the lights are going out." She squeezed Winifred's arm. "It cuts us off and leaves us alone together."

The shallow fall of the land below Hampstead Heath contracted London to a ribbon of unexplored darkness. But the dim bulk of St. Paul's still survived the eclipse of the City, and

far to the south the Surrey hills lay uncertain along the horizon. Clouds lay low on Epsom race-course and obscured the further peaks of Leith Hill and St. Martha's Hill. It was the hour—the precious hour—between her session and Winifred's dinner-time, when often Winifred would run her car up to the Heath, and she and Maisie would together 'look at beauty'. The day, so tedious in its monotony—one patient after another bewailing her private failure and arrogating to herself the unique possession of a cosmic grievance against life—could here be set against the loveliness and obscurity of the English twilight. The shifting shadows, the line of hills that darkened to the south, while in the west light dwindled, withdrew and collapsed, soothed Winifred. One by one, points of brilliance appeared in the emptiness that overhung the Heath, as if Paul's dome itself had enlarged to cosmic proportions for their benefaction. Jean Martin and her Mrs. Fraser, Lydia Bentley, Lady Hollerton, Mrs. Beale and Miss Paine, and all the other dejected females, lapsed from Winifred's consciousness, and left her with a free, unfretted happiness that the presence of Maisie could not disturb and indeed was liable to enhance. At these times they could share a simple contentment in one another's presence, a spiritual solitude and quietness, that nourished the busy days ahead until the next opportunity when they could 'look at beauty' together.

"It is rather lovely," not withdrawing herself from the warmth of Maisie's arm, Winifred said softly: "I felt I simply had to get away from the consulting-room this evening. It's been a simply awful day. I felt I couldn't face another patient. But, of course, when one does my job, one must expect to get that feeling of exhaustion now and then."

"I'd much rather drive up here with you."

"But we shan't——" Winifred glanced at her car waiting with dimmed lights within the crescent of fir trees, "be able to stay long." Her genuine weariness flattered the always ready solicitude that it was heaven to Maisie to give. "I've got to go out again this evening."

"Winifred, you *haven't*." Maisie drew her fur cape more closely round her shoulders and shivered.

"A meeting in connection with the Health Scheme."

"But must you really go? I thought," urged Maisie to Winifred's quiet, tired profile, "you said we could spend the evening together——"

At the faint note of coercion, Winifred's voice went cold. "No. I merely asked if you'd care to drive up to the Heath. After your session."

"But, Winifred, *why?*" Wavering between disappointment and present delight, Maisie seized Winifred by the elbows and pulled her round so that they faced each other. Vibrant in crimson, wearing with an air Caterina's cast-off furs, Maisie even shook Winifred a little. "Oh, I was so pleased and flattered when you asked me to come for a drive. Now you've spoilt it all. I was going to tell you of a dramatic school I've heard of, and which I may be able to buy. I wanted your advice——"

"Not here. " Winifred freed herself gently. "Don't make a scene here. But I do want to hear about the dramatic school." She could not help smiling at the notion of Maisie, suppliant among the leafless beeches, thinking she could hold Winifred away, by the mere pressure of her thin fingers, from an important meeting of specialists and consultants to discuss the Health Scheme. Of course she would have to be there.

"I don't think you're interested one little bit," declared Maisie, hurt.

"You know I am, Maisie. Why, I've been urging you to buy a school for ages. Just as soon as your family could put up the money. But why didn't you tell me when we were in the consulting-room?"

"I didn't want to. I wanted to tell you *here*. At our spot. And now you've spoilt everything."

"But you can still tell me—I can spare half an hour."

"No, I can't," said Maisie. "And what's more, I won't." Head downcast, she watched her foot—dancer's instep, teetering heel—scrape up a few grains of sand from among the emerging roots of the beech tree. Maisie was proud of her feet, and spent more than she could afford on shoes.

"Well," said Winifred cheerfully, "if you won't tell me now, "

that'll be a lovely piece of news for me to look forward to. You know, Maisie, you *are* better."

And indeed, Winifred felt, she had every reason to be proud of her record with Maisie during the past year. Not only with Winifred, but Maisie's entire adjustment to circumstances had perceptibly improved. Rancours and 'crushes', while still disturbing, no longer occupied her entire waking life. She was beginning to see beyond her one absorbing, exclusive passion for Winifred, to the possibility of a wider life. Winifred had often urged her to borrow the money from her relations and open a school of theatrical training in one of the more populous suburbs. It was practical politics, for Maisie's brother-in-law was well-to-do and would be delighted to be rid of her. The important thing was the will—the incentive. While that was lacking one could do nothing with her.

"I suppose I am getting better in a way," admitted Maisie, "though I'd be better still if you could give me more time. Winifred, *couldn't* we spend this evening together? *Please?*"

"Another time," said Winifred firmly. "I can give you half an hour just now, Maisie, and then I must fly. You don't want me to have to go without my dinner, do you?"

"I suppose it's some important affair," said Maisie, sulkily. "You're dolled up to the nines already. Have you got to change for this affair?"

"Dolled up?" repeated Winifred, surprised. "But I'm still wearing my working suit."

"You look perfectly charming, and you know it," retorted Maisie. "You *always* look just right."

"No, seriously." Winifred lifted an eyebrow, but her eyes began to dance. "I know my defects as well as my dressmaker. However——" She assumed a deprecating and comical expression, disarming criticism. "Somehow I always manage to get by."

"You'd get by with murder," said Maisie, but she turned round, mollified, and managed a smile. "Oh well—half an hour is better than nothing, I suppose. But I refuse to talk shop, Winifred. Let's talk about you for a change."

"I'm rather glad you suggested that, Maisie," said Winifred

seriously. "Because, as a matter of fact, there was something I wanted to talk to you about—— something *really* important this time. To you, I mean. That's why I brought you up here. Would you like to sit in the car, or shall we walk up and down?"

"Let's sit in the car. I don't want you to catch a chill." Solicitude and a sense of occasion drove away her disappointment. "Winifred, for Heaven's sake, what is it?"

Sitting shoulder to shoulder in the small car, seeing all London darken through her windscreen, Winifred wondered whether this was indeed the occasion when one might take Maisie into one's confidence. Discretion was no part of Maisie's need for her. Love—Winifred disliked the word with its suggestion of the immoderate, its refusal to contain itself within the limits of good sense—love, with its insatiable demands and its lapses into hate, was an untidy, incalculable thing. But if Maisie were properly grateful for confidences and could keep a still tongue in her head, Winifred preferred to discuss her plans well in advance. She was committed—before Dorothy, before Nigel and, through Nigel, Clifford—to going abroad for three or four months. Just how soon she went depended more upon Dr. Treherne's news of the Regional appointments than upon her own preference. She had no intention of telling her other patients anything until the whole affair was settled and irrevocable and her passage booked. But Maisie was a special case and needed special handling. One could not spring bad news on Maisie and then just walk off and leave her to digest it. There was too much between them, and over too long a period of years, for such heroic measures to be risked. There was the question, too, of placing Maisie under a locum. Maisie would expect to have some say in the choice, and Winifred tully intended discussing the matter with her in some detail. All things considered, Winifred felt that the moment had arrived to give Maisie a hint of what was in store for her. And diplomatically she had provided herself with a little gift to soften the blow, and to give Maisie pleasure at a time when they could no longer be together.

"I've brought you," said Winifred, exploring her handbag, which, thick with letters from patients, sprang open at a touch,

"that little volume of Keats you liked so much. You know—the one from my bedroom shelf. You read me the *Nightingale* once from it, so beautifully, and afterwards we actually heard him while we were sitting on the veranda." As one conferring a kingdom, she pressed a thin, grey book into Maisie's hand.

"That's too good of you, Winifred." Surprised, Maisie opened the little book. Sprigs of pressed lavender marked the pages of poems written by Keats when he too lived in Hampstead: *Endymion*, and the *Eve of St. Agnes*, and the *Nightingale*—whom Keats had heard sing in an adjoining garden. Disinfected by time, the delirium of a love that to its victim was scarcely distinguishable from a malady of the soul as well as the body here lingered on in the precise and lovely disciplines of poetry. "But I did borrow the book once before, you know."

"This time I want you to keep it. No, don't thank me," said Winifred hurriedly. "I want you to have something of mine which I treasure, and which will remind you of the happy times we've had together."

Unsuspecting, Maisie said dreamily: "I've always been so glad you lived off Well Walk. It's the genuine Hampstead. And you live near the spring. You, of all people, who've done such a power of good to people——"

"The spring is overrated," said Winifred dryly. "It's just exceptionally pure spring water. Still, I know what you mean. Well Walk has always been a magnet for faith and hope——" Indeed she herself had often wandered up to Hampstead on a Sunday during her early years as a practitioner. Dr. Treherne's town house in Bedford Square, where Winifred lived until she could afford a home of her own, was more central and saved her money. But the high, narrow houses oppressed her; flats and offices, traffic and hotels, and, above all, the aloof crowds that elbowed one on pavements, all combined to rob her of uniqueness. In Hampstead, a barrier—the shady limes and beeches, the pleasant air of the Heath high above London—protected her from the common touch. She liked to tell patients how Burke had once stood on Evergreen Hill, gazing upon the sky as the sun was setting, and reproving Lord

Erskine, who could foresee nothing but good from the French Revolution. "Ah, Erskine," he said, pointing to the sunset, "this is just the place for a reformer; all the beauties are beyond your reach, you cannot destroy them."

"And for poetry," added Maisie, who knew her Hampstead. More acutely than Winifred, who had acquired guide-books and some rare old prints, Maisie had built up from her reading a whole historic background to Winifred's home. Together they had speculated on the character of WA (saint or sadist?), mentioned in Domesday Book, who maintained his own gallows on the Heath. In the footsteps of Pepys and Evelyn they made for the sites of Belsize Manor and the Manor of Hampstead. They gazed on Weatherall House with its Long Room, and looked for the site of the Pump Room in Well Walk, which survived into the 'eighties. But chiefly they were interested in the writers and artists who at one time or another were residents of Hampstead: Dr. Johnson and Keats, Romney and Constable, Leigh Hunt, Sir Gerald du Maurier and H. G. Wells. Winifred listened attentively to Maisie, who had it all at her fingers' ends, and was more than ever convinced that she had chosen a fitting background for her own personality. In giving her Keats to Maisie, she was therefore leaving in Maisie's charge a very real and intimate extension of herself.

"But I brought you up here to-night for a definite reason," went on Winifred, carefully directing her gaze to the levels and uplands of Surrey beyond the windscreen. "I'm going to let you into a secret, Maisie. It's something I haven't yet told any of my patients, and I'm not going to for some time. But I had to let *you* know. And I'm trusting you not to say anything about it to anyone just yet."

She felt the jerk of alarm in Maisie's body pressed against her own. The older woman's haggard face turned on her in a flash. "Oh, I've had a presentiment all day that something was going to happen. Winifred, *what is it?* Are you going to get married?"

"Married?" Winifred's voice was light with incredulity. "Oh no. Nothing quite as final as that." In the half-dusk she

smiled, her beribboned toque inclined towards Maisie like an amiable cat with inquisitive, pricked ears.

"That's a relief," breathed Maisie, relaxing a little, and putting a hand tentatively on Winifred's knee.

"But I *shall* be going away for a time," said Winifred with finality. "No, wait and let me explain, and don't say anything until I've finished, Maisie. You see, it's like this." She sighed and put her own cool hand over Maisie's hot one. "Listen. I've been feeling rather overdone for a long time now, and I've decided the time has come when I can afford to take a fairly long holiday. Out of England. With my brother who's fruit-farming in Australia. I wanted to go and visit him in 1940. I'd promised myself I'd go for three months then and have a complete relaxation from work. But the war came, and I stayed in England. I haven't even seen my niece and nephew yet. But now—— Why, what's the matter, Maisie?"

"No, no! You can't do that to me," gasped Maisie, finding her voice suddenly, for the shock had left her momentarily speechless. Oblivious of their surroundings, she had flung her arms round Winifred and held her swaying in the confined front seat of the small Morris.

With hands of iron, Winifred seized her wrists and forced her back into her own corner. "Maisie! Pull yourself together! If you don't behave you'll have to get out of this car——"

"I'm sorry." The tears streamed down Maisie's thin cheeks. "But, Winifred. . . . You know I can't do without you. For God's sake, don't leave me. . . . I shall go mad. Raving, screaming mad. I shall commit suicide. I shall throw myself under a train. Into the sea. . . ."

"Nonsense," said Winifred curtly. "You're acting like a child. And a very silly child too." She leant forward and was not reassured by the image of herself that her mirror presented: toque hanging from one ear, cape dragging off one shoulder. Her hands flew up to save the slipping coil on her nape. "Look what you've done to my hair."

"What do I care about hair?" wailed Maisie. "You tell me you're going to leave me. I tell you I'll commit suicide."

And all you can think of is what you look like in a mirror."

"Well, it's rather important," retorted Winifred, calming down a little. "Look, Maisie, you must be sensible about this." She balanced the hat on her knee, and took the remaining pins out of her hair. "I'll have to re-set it. Maisie, I don't think you really mean what you're saying. With the well part of you, you're glad I'm going to have a holiday. You know how badly I need a rest. A few months' sunshine and complete freedom from responsibility."

"Oh yes," said Maisie drearily. "I am glad, I suppose. I know you've never spared yourself——"

"Well then——" Winifred smiled and twisted a fringe of curls round the tail of her comb. "And it'll only be for a short time."

Hugging her knee with both hands, Maisie stared into the pocket at her end of the dashboard. Discarded brown paper and empty cigarette cartons spilled a litter on to the floor of the car, which was grey with scattered ash. A sense of her loss smote her afresh. There were a thousand small jobs which she had come to take over for Winifred, from mending her gloves and addressing her envelopes to giving her her sweet ration. There would be no opportunity, next spring, to weed Winifred's borders or prune her roses. "You may never come back. You may get married out there."

"That's very unlikely," said Winifred decidedly. "Besides, when I come back I shall most probably have some important administrative work to do. In fact, I'm waiting to hear about that before I make my final plans."

"May I write to you?" asked Maisie suddenly.

"No!" spat back Winifred, with a vehemence that surprised herself. But she knew very well the cause. For she was so tired. She was already exhausted and ravaged by the demands of her patients, and why should she want to waste her precious first vacation after twenty years' grind, reading their letters and writing to them again? Lady Hollerton, Mrs. Martin, Miss Bentley. . . . She never wanted to see any of them again. They had made, for all her efforts, so little progress. There was so little to show for all her labour and her time consumed.

... But Maisie was different. She reminded herself of Maisie's history—— a psychotic inheritance (Maisie's father had thrown himself from a cliff, an aunt had died in an asylum), and lifelong dependence on a younger woman, so that she could not, and would not, take her own life into her own hands——curbing her anger, but none the less determined not to have her holiday ruined by any patient whatsoever.

"You're as cruel to me as Clare was," Maisie accused her, beginning to cry again, but this time more quietly.

"Maisie, for Heaven's sake——" Sheer weariness made Winifred's face go small. In the gathering darkness she turned on Maisie big-pupilled eyes from which all colour had ebbed. "How," she asked, spreading out her hands in a hopeless gesture, "can I be expected to get a rest and change from patients, if they all start writing to me?"

"I didn't say 'all'," retorted Maisie, hurt. "I asked if *I* could write to you."

"And the answer is 'no'." Winifred bit her lip and looked out of the window. Dry and bitter words crowded in her throat, but she clenched her hands to stop herself from uttering them. Darkness between the trunks of fir trees, the intensity of clouds spread low over the Thames estuary where no lights glinted and no water reflected for her the clear darkness of the January sky, reminded her of the time. It was overridingly important that she should be punctual at her meeting, and time was flying fast. Shading the dash with one arm, she jabbed on the light and the dials sprang illuminated into view. Nearly seven o'clock. Why, she would have to miss dinner at this rate, and she had eaten nothing since lunch-time. Into four icy words she concentrated the whole dammed-up irritation of the long-drawn-out day and the intolerable evening. "I'm through with you," she said between closed teeth, and remembered with relief that at any rate she had the car, and could get away quickly from an argument that she was too unwell and exhausted even to end.

She pressed the self-starter with unnecessary violence and jerked the gears, so that the little car began bouncing up and down over hummocks of gravelly grass and the roots of

giant trees. With a screech they went into top, sweeping their headlights round bends at an angle that left Maisie clutching the handle of the door and casting terrified and imploring glances at Winifred. Always a reckless driver, never before had Winifred driven her as wildly as this. Maisie's frantic "I won't let you go unless you promise to leave me your address" was lost in the general uproar as the Morris descended from the Heath, and in a matter of seconds, it seemed, drew up with a final screeching of brakes at Winifred's gate.

Winifred jumped out of the car and almost ran up the garden path, feeling for her latch-key as she went. Maisie, sick with apprehension, followed her through the gate and stood, uncertain, on the path. Leaded panes of green and gold glass silhouetted the pyramid of Winifred's big squirrel cape and shed on Maisie's hollow cheeks a deathly illumination. It was not until Winifred was safely within her own hall that she appeared to remember her forlorn fellow-passenger. The appalling drive had released some tension, and she spoke more kindly than would have been possible a few minutes before. "I'm sorry, Maisie. I know it's hard for you to accept my going away. And it sounds hard that I won't let you write to me. But think it over. You'll find it's quite reasonable if you only take the sensible view. Now don't keep me——" She closed the door until only a narrow slit of light remained. "I've got to have my dinner quickly and get off to my meeting. You can telephone me at the week-end if you like. And I'll see you next week as usual. But not before. You really must learn to control yourself."

'The plunge into the pit' which usually followed her sessions with Winifred always left Maisie with an urge—sometimes weak, sometimes overwhelming—to suicide. She had so often discussed this possibility with Winifred that Winifred had come to discount the risk. At all times psychiatry carried risks, and always the patient could be compelled to take the blame. Ordinarily, suicide threats left her unmoved. To-night, when she was so tired and overwrought, Winifred was least of all prepared to cope with any sort of tragedy. She told herself

firmly, as she sat down to her solitary dinner, that Maisie would go home.

The medical meeting, later that evening, was a lively one. Under a ceiling studded with golden moons which shed an impartial smoky radiance on colourless walls and close-set benches, all Harley Street spoke with one voice in its detestation of the Health Scheme; Aneurin Bevan was pilloried by speaker after speaker as the arch-enemy of the B.M.A. 'The menace of totalitarianism'; 'this gigantic fraud perpetrated on a populace ignorant of the issues at stake'; the 'tyranny of a slave-Utopia': these and other clichés were flung about the hall, rousing the meeting to a furore. Here and there a more temperate voice reminded the doctors that both they and the politicians were in danger of overlooking the one person who really mattered—the patient; that while doctors argued how they should be paid, there were in London alone over eight thousand hospital beds empty for lack of staff to tend them; that thousands of people—the sick, the frail, the poor and the aged—needed but could not obtain the medical care which could be made available to them. But these were voices in the wilderness.

Ordinarily Winifred would have entered the controversy with zest. She had always, so far in her professional life, done exactly as she pleased. Her income from private patients was a very satisfactory one. She had also hit on a way of increasing her profits from those who were less well-to-do. At their first consultation she would allow them timidly to enquire what her fees would be; then, after a show of hesitation, she would say regretfully: "My usual fee is three guineas, of course, but I make a reduced fee of two guineas in special cases. However, for *you*, seeing you need therapy so badly—" here she would pause, and look up with her most disarming smile—"we'll bring it right down. Let's say one guinea? Would that be too much for you? . . . Are you sure?" She would wait for the gratitude to subside, and then add as an after-thought: "You can pay me each time you come, if you find it easier that way. Then we shan't have any bother about big bills." Cash

thus collected was slipped into the petty cash drawer, and neither cheques nor receipts were exchanged to record the transaction. When the auditors went through her books and her income-tax returns were made, the petty cash drawer was conveniently forgotten.

It was only natural that she should resent any intrusion by the State on her power and her privacy. As the meeting progressed, Winifred began to suspect that the Scheme might, after all, lapse because no doctors would be found to work it. Bevan and the rest, she thought, were shooting with a child's bow and arrows at the embattled squadrons of the B.M.A. Whichever way the cat jumped, however, she herself would be sitting pretty. If the plan went through, she hoped to be on the Regional Board to administer it. If it lapsed, she would be no worse off than she was at present. And at present she was doing very nicely, thank you.

Around her, angry voices addressed the chair, shouting approval of every fresh threat of defiance from the speakers. The bodies of men and women leaned forward as one. Chins lifted, eyes snapping, the dark and the pale faces, the prosperous and the fanatical, the intelligent and the avaricious, were tilted upward in one gesture of passionate repudiation. Winifred herself did not relax her attitude of calm and considering attention. Once or twice she looked furtively round to recognise the doctors she knew. Dr. Frayle, *mondaine* in black with touches of light blue at wrists and throat, was shouting with the rest. She had been a self-opiniated chit, Winifred remembered, when she first came to the Bedford Square house as clinical assistant to Dr. Treherne. So tiresome too in her insistence that every therapist should first be analysed. All that emotional upset for nothing! Winifred had taken such obstinacy as a deliberate act of aggression against herself, since she, older both in age and clinical experience, saw no sense in submitting herself to the upheaval of an analysis. In a corner beyond Dr. Frayle, Winifred could just see the bowed grey head of Frank Dewey, studying his finger-nails and probably reserving judgment. In this demonstration of outraged professionalism, he at least did not, Winifred observed, seem to

amount to much. Yet Dr. Treherne had warned her that Dewey was in fact her most dangerous rival. Dangerous? It was the last word that most people would have applied to Dewey. . . .

They emerged from the cream and chromium radiance into a night of chilling rain, unlit by stars. Small gusts of wind laid icy fingers on their cheeks, hot with enthusiasm and the impact of several hundred people in the overcrowded, centrally-heated hall. Winifred, who had changed her tweed suit for a dress of thin crêpe and was wearing a new hat, ducked her head, and made herself as small as she could within her squirrel cape. She had not, after all, waited behind to mull over the meeting with the other doctors who were still arguing in the vestibule. A tiny feeling of apprehension, connected in some way with Dewey though she could not trace the cause, was tugging her back in the direction of Hampstead. Hurrying round a side street to unlock her car, she told herself how absurd she was. The leaders of the B.M.A., influential and important men, were behind her in the building from which she had just fled: Dr. Treherne and Dr. Dewey, Elizabeth Frayle and other psychiatrists, were still standing about in groups, letting themselves be noticed, airing their opinions. She ought to be there in the middle of them, instead of (for she knew now what she was afraid of) rushing off home for the sake of a small and quite unjustifiable intuition of danger.

Danger—— It was with an almost professional interest that she watched the shaking of her hand as she fumbled with the switch of the car's headlights. She drove back up to Hampstead in a fury of concentration. Emerging from her own garage, it took her so long to bolt the heavy doors into the cement that she could hear her own heart beating. She had only one thought: to get to the telephone and ring up Maisie's school; to hear Maisie's voice; and to assure her that of course, of *course*, she would leave Maisie her address in Australia and expect to hear from her. . . . Beyond that, she did not care to think. . . .

Green and gold light from the leaded panes of her front door shed a diffuse illumination through the slanting rain on to her

flowerless garden. Miss Begg would already be gone to bed, but there would be a fire in the lounge and supper laid ready on the wagon. Winifred opened her handbag and found the Yale key that Maisie, concerned for her recurrent forgetfulness, had fastened to the inner pocket with a steel chain. She was flinging the door wide open, when a shadow detached itself from the trunk of the beech tree and stepped forward into the clear light of the hall.

"Oh, Maisie——" In her relief, Winifred threw her arms round Maisie's unresisting form and drew her within the house. "Thank God, you're here. I've been so worried about you. If you hadn't been here, I was going to ring up the school and find out how you were——" Delight at Maisie's appearance, so taken for granted until it became just possible that some day one might look for her in vain, loosened in Winifred some inhibition that kept her normally silent. She chattered volubly as she hurried Maisie through the hall into the lounge and thrust her into the arm-chair by the fire, and made hasty preparations for a supper that was, after all, not to be partaken of in solitude. Firelight, glowing along the green pile of the carpet but just not reaching the white and shadowy walls, held their two arm-chairs in a pale and flickering circle. Hollow-eyed, almost beyond speech, Maisie let herself be arranged in the chair, while Winifred bustled round the room, switching on the standard lamp, plugging in the coffee percolator, and lifting the lid of the biscuit tin to see what Miss Begg had provided. She reached up to the mantelpiece for cigarettes.

"Virginian or Turkish? . . . No, Maisie, I insist on you having one. . . . Of course you care which you have. . . . Come on now. We'll have one together while I make some coffee. Then I'm going to drive you home."

Maisie said in a low voice: "It's too late. You ought to go to bed——"

"Nonsense," said Winifred, lighting a spill from the fire. "If it's not too late for you, it's not too late for me." She knelt down by Maisie's chair and loosened her furs. "Now you just rest and let me get the supper. What," she asked over one shoulder, "have you been doing all evening?"

Nervously drawing at her cigarette, Maisie said: "I don't know. . . . Just wandering about, I think. I didn't mean to come back here and worry you. . . . I just found myself here, and the garage was still empty. . . ."

"Well, it was a very good thing you came." Sitting down at last opposite Maisie, with the firelight flickering between them, Winifred felt it was pleasant to be welcomed home again at the end of such a day, and to feel its accumulated anxieties fall off one by one as midnight drew near to fold them in the innocence and irresponsibility of sleep.

The coffee was bubbling in the percolator. A log, falling forward out of the fire, showered some whitening ash on to the glittering green tiles. Spooning sugar into the coffee-cups, Winifred said cheerfully: "And when I go to Australia, Maisie, of course I shall leave you my address. I shall look forward to hearing from you. And I'll write to you from time to time. Of *course* I want you to write to me."

XXII

NO ONE at Walthamstow was aware of Winifred's plans for a holiday. When she arrived there the following day, the hospital was already stirring from its afternoon somnolence, and Sister Andrewes, disconsolate in Out-Patients, was chatting to Sister Martin, who had poked her head round the passage on her way from Convulsion Therapy. It was not visiting day and only a few relatives of new cases had passed through the porter's lodge since lunch-time. Dr. Dewey's car was parked beside Winifred's at the main entrance.

Sister Martin grinned. "What? Still waiting for Our Dear Winifred? Lordy! If I had your job, I'd put on a couple of stone and be dieting to take it off my bottom. Look here—I wish you'd check those reports on the E.C.T. series."

"Oh, for Christ's sake," exploded Andrewes, jabbing a fore-

finger on the neat pile of buff folders on Winifred's desk, "don't ask me to do anything else just now. Everything's lousy. Winifred may arrive at any moment. One supposes she will turn up some time before Out-Patients closes. And I've got all those heavy-weights on my hands. Did you see the poor dears sitting in the passage?" She jerked her head towards the glass door, beyond which a row of brooding faces could be seen, some twitching and frowning, some heavily impassive, and all marked with the discontent and self-absorption of various neuroses.

Sister Martin's quick glance flashed from the door to her colleague's rosy, pleasant face, now a little downcast, the bright, brown eyes thoughtful beneath the smooth brows and glazed linen cap. Sister Andrewes was sitting on the arm of the patients' chair, her black, hospital shoe tapping the stained floor, the hem of her starched, dark gown lightly a-swing. "They're still yammering up there in Dewey's room," said Martin in a low voice, for she could see the patients from the tail of her eye. "Dewey convulsed Belchamber this afternoon, and I've just put the old thing back to bed. Winifred was on the watch, if you ask me—— she grabbed Dewey as he was making for his car. What's the betting she's making a pass at him—the old war-horse? Did you see the new hat and veil?"

"You don't say!" Andrewes looked up with interest. "But I don't think it's that. If you want to know," she said darkly, "I think there's something in the wind. When Winifred speaks to Dewey—unless she's absolutely obliged to—she's up to summat."

"Do you think the old 'un's going to retire? At long last?"

"It might be that, of course. Treherne can't last for ever."

"Winifred won't be sorry. Though I think she likes old Treherne, and no wonder. She's not a bad sort. I've always got on well with her. Winifred'll miss her, I think."

Andrewes tossed back the white wings of her cap and snorted. "Miss her? Not she! She'd sell her down the river any day if it suited her ladyship's book."

"Well, you may be right. But it was Treherne who put

Orwin where she is now. She'd never have made it off her own bat."

"I believe you. And Winifred's got the sense to know which side her bread's buttered. But Treherne's a back number now. You can't do psychiatry after you go deaf." Martin looked round the small, cream-washed room a little enviously, for she had a busy four hours in front of her, coping with double wards, and acquainting new patients with the rules and habits of a strange and gregarious environment. Hostile and desiring only to be left alone, her patients usually began their new life in the hospital defiant of influence and determined to maintain their separateness. The first day was not too soon to begin making contact with minds that were estranged by loneliness, fear and despair. But the shortage of hospital staff oppressed her. She was overworked, and when you had too much to do you did nothing well. Mild headache behind her eyes hollowed her temples, and her usual clear pallor was blotched with a fine criss-cross of veins. She was tall, like Andrewes, but more slenderly built, and less resistant to the physical and mental strain of nursing. Interest in her work kept her going in spite of a physique not altogether suitable. "Cosy little place you've got here, haven't you? Wish they'd put me on to Out-Patients."

"You can have it, as far as I'm concerned," said Andrewes discontentedly. A frown creased her smooth brow, and she darted a look of dislike round the small, pleasant room. It was the office where Winifred would at any moment now receive the patients—a square, light room, with distempered walls, and stained floor covered with a strip of chocolate-coloured matting. In the centre of the room was the doctor's desk, laid out with some sheets of fresh paper, a clock, a white-stemmed desk-lamp with an opal shade, and the files of case-notes.

"Well, what's wrong with it?"

"It isn't the room," complained Andrewes, with a twitch of her skirt. "It's the shocking waste of a perfectly good afternoon. Here I've been since two o'clock waiting for Winifred to arrive. And look at the time now. After three. It isn't as

if I could get up my lecture notes or do a spot of knitting. I've got to pretend I'm busy."

"Well, it's worse for the patients."

"Of course it is. That's why I get so fed up."

"Oh well." Martin crossed to the door sedately and stood for a moment looking at the row of waiting faces outside. Seeing her shadow darken the glass, they all tilted up hopefully, but the sight of her bulky uniform, instead of the doctor's spruce, tailored figure, brought varying expressions of resentment, disappointment and resignation, none of which were lost on Martin, who flashed them a reassuring smile. "They've bought a packet there, poor devils. Why doesn't somebody tell them?" she murmured.

"Oh, shut up! You make me tired," said Andrewes, rising from the arm of the chair. "Look, I'll have to start bustling about a bit if you're going." Though, in fact, for the moment she could think of nothing to do. But it was fatal to stand about as if there were time to spare during Dr. Orwin's clinics. Patients sometimes attacked the nurse on duty for the doctor's unpunctuality. Andy, as she was known at the hospital, was a cheerful young woman, who really enjoyed her job; but, as she often remarked over the Monday hash and boiled cabbage, an hour of hanging about, trying to look busy, tired her more than two of nursing. "Damn and blast everything," she said, and crossed to the window and stared out at the quadrangle, where the leafless chestnut, humped up under the low-lying January sky, gave as yet no hint of its bunched and tender fingers that would soon illuminate the hospital garden with the green fires of spring.

"Isn't your sense of humour a trifle adolescent?" remarked Martin dryly, and turned the handle of the door. She sniffed. "Nervous Disorders! I'd give the whole lot of them a job of work to do." Muttering, "Orwin too," she flopped out, and the clack of her heels on the parquet of the corridor died in the distance. Lifting amused eyebrows, "What's bitten her?" enquired Sister Andrewes to the silent Psychiatry Wing.

Later, returning from tea, Sister Martin popped her head round the door in Out-Patients to enquire how things were

going, and met the distraught gaze of Sister Andrewes, who was mopping the floor with a cloth and a slop-pail. "Why, what's up now?"

"Don't talk to me," said Andrewes wearily. "We're only half-way through. One patient had hysterics on my neck, and the creature in there now is nearly inarticulate. There's another waiting in the passage, and after that we have a protégée. One of La Orwin's particular pets. She comes in soon after five. Little office girl who looks like a T.B., and thinks Our Winifred the cat's whiskers. Hammond's her name. *Doreen Hammond*, I think."

"H'm. Why all this business with the floor-cloth?"

Sister Andrewes sat back on her heels. "I told you. One of the patients had hysterics when she came out. Wept on my neck, and ended with a vomit."

"You do have fun in here," said Martin, impressed. "What did she vomit for?"

"Winifred's enough to make anyone vomit," said Andrewes, with a vicious flip of her wrist as she wrung out the cloth. "But in this case, the woman was plain overwrought. Middle-aged woman with glasses. Popping eyes. Veined hands. Married. She's been coming for some time now. Always gets very agitated if she has to wait long. Which she usually does——"

Martin cocked an ear in the direction of Winifred's room. "There's someone coming out now, isn't there?"

"Oh, very likely." Andrewes lowered her voice and resumed her mopping. "There's a schoolmistress in with her. Fiftyish. Head of an elementary school. Can't talk properly. Give Orwin her due—this woman's better than she was when she first came. She actually asked me the time this afternoon. It's funny," she said reflectively, "how very unsocial N.D. patients are. You take any ordinary clinic. They all chat together and tell each other the tale. But this lot——" She shook her head. "They just sit in a row on the bench, and look up hopefully when I flit in and out. But they never speak."

"Well—I suppose it's no good asking if you're going down to tea?"

"Tea?" repeated Andrewes dejectedly. "What's tea? However, my stomach's caving in, and I shall probably do a spectacular faint on the doormat of the Holy of Holies. So I may join them yet. That'd larn her."

"The trouble with you," grinned Martin, preparing for departure, "is that you've too much conscience."

"Conscience?" said Andrewes indignantly. "Who said I had a conscience? All the same, there are limits—— Sometimes I think I'll apply for a transfer——"

"There you go again. I diagnose obsession, and prescribe a course of Psycho-therapy Before It's Too Late."

"Psycho-therapy," echoed Andrewes, in a tone of deep disgust, as the door of Winifred's room opened and the patient emerged, a little unsteadily, and clattered off down the corridor. "There's no one," she whispered just above her breath, "who needs psycho-therapy more badly than Our Dear Winifred. Why the hell doesn't the woman get herself analysed? . . ."

But to Doreen, discussing her boy friend an hour later, such an opinion would have seemed blasphemous.

"Eric's been ever so nicely brought up," she told Winifred, after she had finished her account of the week's doings and both she and Winifred were prepared to call it a day. The light from the opal-shaded desk-lamp lent a pleasant air of intimacy to the scene. The small clock ticked placidly. Doreen's file lay open beneath the lamp, and beside it there lay the photo of a young man. Winifred's fountain-pen had not, after all, been used. There was nothing fresh to record about Doreen's case. Doreen was rounder, firmer, altogether less transparent and delicate than the weedy, overgrown adolescent that she had presented at the age of sixteen. The look of strain on her temples, the unchildish brown eyes, too nervously wide open, the hesitant, stammering speech, the whole discouraged, stooping posture—they were all improved beyond recognition. Her clothes too were brighter and more expressive of her brittle little personality. She was wearing for this visit to Winifred shrimp-pink with brown trimmings, and had chosen them with

the clinic in mind. For Winifred had told her: "Always dress to your background. With those attractive dark eyes of yours, and your pretty curls, you could wear anything. Lucky you!" And now that Doreen felt so much better, so much more alive, the range of her experiments with clothes had indeed become remarkable. Altogether it was a happy, confident little creature that sat on the very edge of the brown-upholstered patient's chair, looking at Winifred with utterly adoring eyes.

"Well now, isn't that just perfect?" murmured Winifred, and stared respectfully at the young man's portrait in sepia, which Doreen had shyly produced from her handbag. It showed her a tanned, egg-shaped head, rising from an open cricket-shirt, and an engaging expression between candour and mulishness.

"Oh, I'm sure you'd like him," went on Doreen hopefully. "He's really ever so nice. And he's what you might call a gentleman. I mean—well, he's in the insurance, and that's a steady job, isn't it? And they don't take what you might call rough types. He's quite a one at the chapel too. Takes a class of boys on Sundays, and belongs to the youth club. He's really the sort of fellow Dad might come to like, if he were spoken to tactfully. Of course, it's not very easy to convince Dad——" But her eyes were eloquent with the certainty that if anyone could get over the redoubtable Dad, that one would be Winifred. "But if you were to speak to him——"

"Well, I will if you like."

"Oh, thank you," cried Doreen. "How perfectly lovely!" And in a rush of gratitude she picked up the precious photo and offered it to her beloved doctor to keep. "No, I've got another one. I have really. I would like you to have a photo of Eric for yourself. You see, if it hadn't been for you I don't s'pose we'd ever have met."

A little touched, Winifred smiled and accepted the token. Eric was squeezed into her handbag between a note from Lydia and a whole wad of correspondence from other, more expressive patients. Her face hardened as the glimpse of Lydia's handwriting reminded her of a job she must give Joyce Wicklow the first thing on Thursday. The note from Lydia said that she was

too depressed after Monday's visit to see Dr. Orwin again, and that she wished to discontinue treatment. Good! Nothing could please Winifred better. She would write accepting Lydia's dismissal, and hope to goodness that this time it would be final. For patients were apt to weaken and change their mind, and if Lydia wrote later that she would like to resume treatment it would be difficult to refuse her. Winifred felt her time was far too valuable to be wasted on middle-aged failures who refused to accept the truth that their lives were over. With Doreen, on the contrary, one could visualise a future. . . .

The young man Eric had entered more and more frequently into Doreen's conversation of late. It seemed they had become friendly at the office, where he had helped her once or twice with her letters during the Christmas rush. After that they met in the evening to go to the cinema—a development only made possible when Doreen, with another girl patient of Winifred's, moved into the tiny attic flat of Mrs. Chatham at Paddington.

Eric was no ordinary film addict. He read his Sunday paper carefully and compared the film reviews in it with those of the *Chronicle*. Wiser perhaps than many people whose education he envied, he regarded the cinema as a comment on history and a guide to the contemporary situation. With a little more clarity in distinguishing between the romantic manipulation of appearances and the real, he might have arrived at some important conclusions about life. But his efforts at self-improvement were startlingly more heart-whole than Doreen's. Together they gaped with wonder at *The Seventh Veil* and *Cæsar and Cleopatra*; kindly, over ices in a milk bar, he explained to her the bits she failed to understand. Between sessions with Winifred and discussions with Eric, or rather Eric's attempts to blueprint a more reasonable world, Doreen's education was proceeding apace.

Thankful that Doreen had been able to attract such an estimable young man, Winifred had next suggested that Doreen should invite him to her little flat to drink coffee and meet her friend and co-patient, Jennifer. This was Doreen's first essay in hospitality, but she had been burning to give a party ever

since the perfectly heavenly evening when Dr. Orwin drove her out to Hampstead for supper. A little puzzled by her first impression of Winifred's house—furniture slight, and spaced out along pictureless walls, an absence of bric-à-brac—she was nevertheless shrewd enough to distinguish between taste and ostentation. Everything here was expensive and stream-lined—almost defiantly 'not-for-show'. (For instance, her mother would never have set a guest down to halibut with creamed potatoes, followed by a simple apple tart.) Though naïve, Doreen was not a fool. She had expected caviare or its equivalent, and was worried beforehand about the array of knives and forks laid out for the rich. Yet when they finished supper, her skirt belt felt slack; she was young enough to be surprised at this. But Winifred's silver cutlery and heavy damask napkins were lovely to handle. She said as much to Winifred, who smiled and told her one could get enchanting effects from coloured paper napkins and the new pastel plastics: had she seen what the sixpenny stores had to offer? As for Eric, Winifred was sure he would not expect a banquet. Interesting sandwiches and some really good coffee would see her far. In this, Winifred could help with some practical suggestions: and she showed Doreen then and there how to make coffee as they understood coffee in France.

"Oh yes, Eric enjoyed 'himself like anything,'" Doreen told her, when the party at the flat had successfully been accomplished. "Mrs. Chatham answered the door-bell and showed him up. It was all thoroughly proper and above-board, as you might say. And Jennifer and I picked a whole lot of holly and broom on Streatham Common and decorated the room. And the supper was *lovely*." This vignette of intimacy—all 'so proper and above-board'—touched Winifred to an odd little vicarious elation. Yet she sighed, recognising that here began the end of a relationship that stirred her to amused tenderness. From henceforth Eric's star would rise in proportion as her own would set. Doreen would go the way of Beryl and Hilary, of Jessica and Muriel, of Gillian and Rosemary and Kay . . . for all of whom she had served as a lay figure merely. Round her they had draped the fantastic sentimentalities of a warped

adolescence. It was right for them to leave her; but she could not pretend to herself that she felt any great enthusiasm for the young man Eric, who stared at her with such self-confidence from the sepia postcard.

"Eric does look rather charming," she commented, however. "This was taken in Guernsey, was it?"

"Yes. St. Peter Port. That's where the boats come in. It's not exactly French, you know, though there are a lot of French names about. Eric thinks it enlarges your mind to travel a bit. But I expect," said Doreen wistfully, "you've been properly abroad, haven't you? Switzerland, and all those places."

"I travelled when I was young," said Winifred. Vienna and Stuttgart with Dorothy, Switzerland with Dr. Treherne, lonely holidays in continental watering-places, where the effort to look as exhilarated as everyone else hurt one's face, floated through her mind. Orange and white awnings, the heat of Paris in August, the freedom from known social patterns of behaviour that allows one to say to foreigners in trains what one would hesitate to say to one's best friend at home—she had known them all. "It's wonderful to be seventeen, Doreen, and have all the world in front of you." ∴

"Do you know," said Doreen with her confident little air between shyness and frankness, "before you took me to your house, I always thought of you as being here in hospital all the time. I couldn't imagine you doing things like an ordinary person." She blushed at the memory of her own stupidity. "I mean travelling in trains. Perhaps even using buses." In fact, even now Doreen could not quite picture Winifred in a bus. Certainly not in an English bus. A foreign one might be different. A foreign bus would be opulent and strange.

Winifred laughed outright. She enjoyed her status with clinic patients, and in spite of the money often imagined that she would prefer to have a private income so that she could dispense medicine as a charity. "I think your next move," she said, "should be to introduce Eric to your parents."

"Yes, I do want to do that," agreed Doreen eagerly. "You see, Dad thinks a job in the insurance is a very nice one for a young man. It's not like being in a business. You see, bad

times come and then where are you? That's what went wrong with Dad. When the slump came, he hadn't got any capital to carry him on. Well, you want capital anyway if you're going to branch out. You must branch out, Dad says, or the multiples come along and squeeze you out. But in the insurance—well, they never go out of business, if you know what I mean."

Winifred looked up enquiringly. "But I understood your father was doing quite well just now?"

"Oh yes, he's not too bad. But then times are good for anybody just now, with the shortages and all that," said Doreen vaguely. "He doesn't think all these high wages will last. Bound to be another slump, he says. That's why he's pretty sure to think a lot of Eric. You see, Eric's ambitious. He goes to evening classes and he's studying for promotion. There's always plenty of room at the top, Eric says."

"And he's quite right." A little depressed by the virtues of Eric, who seemed quite unexceptionable, Winifred glanced at the desk-clock. "Well, Doreen, I think you have found an excellent friend, and my advice to you is to introduce him to your family, and get him to take you home to his. You must regularise the position."

Gathering her things together, Doreen said anxiously: "But you don't think Dad'll think him too worldly?"

"Leave me to deal with your father," said Winifred with a smile. "If there's any smoothing-over to be done, you can rely on me. We'll put Eric 'on a footing'."

XXIII

WINIFRED'S CHARITY work formed a block in the early half of the week, which was regrettable. But since it happened that way, she could make a virtue of accident, and tell Maisie, so great was her conscientiousness, that her clinic patients saw

her when she was at her freshest, and benefited by more of her time and her attention than those who were able to pay for it. Walthamstow Hospital on Monday afternoons was followed by the Child Guidance Clinic on Tuesday mornings. Although she was paid for her sessions at this clinic, Winifred regarded it as voluntary work, since the patients themselves paid nothing for it, and could be expected to show proper gratitude for a service that was offered them out of charity.

Mrs. Mainwaring shared Winifred's view, and was waiting in a mood of expectant humility in the Town Hall the following morning, while Angela was in the doctor's room talking to Winifred. Winifred gave ten minutes to the mother and half an hour to the child at the C.G.C. Alternatively, mother or child was the first to be seen, and on this particular Tuesday it was Angela's turn to precede her mother.

"I've been chosen to play Alice in the school play, and I've got more to say than anybody else in the whole thing," announced Angela, who was sitting cross-legged on Winifred's desk within the sanctum. She tossed her head to show how little she cared, but under the deceptive, falling lashes her eyes darted narrow glances at Winifred, missing nothing. "It's an awful nuisance having such a big part."

Winifred, fountain-pen in hand, looked up to ask mildly: "Do you find it difficult to learn?"

"Oh no." Angela uncurled her legs, and was off the desk with a flash of blue knickers under her Scotch kilt. Legs apart, she faced Winifred. "I know it already. I know everybody else's part," she boasted. "I've only heard them say it a few times and I know it all. It's *easy*."

"I always thought you looked like Tenniel's Alice."

"Tenniel? Is that the man who drew the pictures?" The yellow jersey and dark kilt came quietly to rest by Winifred's side.

"Yes, he was the first illustrator of Lewis Carroll." Winifred swivelled the chair and abandoned her note-book. Outside the clinic window winter mist, filling the west of the courtyard, darkened the green and glossy room. Lamps were lit, though it was morning; time was an artificial affair, measured only by

the clock. A heavy fog filled the London streets. Londoners everywhere were late to work, and the clinic itself was behind-hand with appointments. Nervous of driving her own car, Winifred had rung up for a taxi, and wondered whether any of her patients would turn out in such weather. Not that it mattered. She herself was paid by the session.

"He was a very good draw-er, wasn't he?"

"Who? Oh, Tenniel. Yes. That one book made him quite famous."

Angela put a hand on Winifred's neck. "Why did you think I looked like Alice-in-Wonderland?"

Winifred raised a finger, and drew it softly across Angela's brow, where the bleached hair line sprang from the smooth ivory skin. "Because Alice's hair grew just like yours does. Only she had it brushed back under a ribbon. *Your* Mummy ties yours in a bow."

"Is that why you gave me a blue hair-ribbon once?"

Winifred laughed. "For that, and for other reasons, I expect. But yes. Alice was a very sensible, nice little girl, you know. Just like you are."

Angela rubbed her cheek against Winifred's shoulder. "You always smell so nice." She put a hand inside Winifred's jacket, and stroked the soft wool of her pullover. "Mummy wears these sort of jerseys, but the colours aren't as nice as yours. I wish *you* were my Mummy." She jerked her hand out in astonishment, and stepped back to see Winifred more clearly as a whole. "No, I don't. I love my Mummy. But I love you too. I love you, and Mummy, and Daddy, and my pussy-cat." She stamped her foot, and a flush of vexation throbbed under her clear pallor. "I don't know which I love best. And sometimes I don't love anybody at all. I hate everybody, and I wish I was dead."

Winifred eyed her calmly. "But you don't wish that nearly as often as you used to, do you?"

Standing stork-like on one foot, Angela considered this. Over her averted cheek the fair hair swung like a curtain of fine, limp string. "No. Sometimes I feel very good, and then I love everybody. But sometimes I feel so bad, I want

to kill everybody. Do you think—" she looked up askance—"I'm horrid?"

"Oh dear, no." Winifred smiled again irrepressibly. "Besides, after you'd killed them, I expect you'd want to make them better again, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, I would, I would." Angela flopped on to the rug by the radiator and began to thread her fingers through the safety-pin in her kilt. Absorbed in this, her colour receded, leaving her skin blue-white against the yellow jersey. Winifred wondered if Mrs. Mainwaring fed her properly. Anxious children, however, often refused to eat much.

"I'm making up a lovely story in my head," said Angela suddenly.

Winifred raised her eyebrows. "What fun. May I hear it?"

"It's about a budgerigar." Angela rolled over on to her tummy and propped her chin on her hands. Winifred shifted in her chair. Over them both, repellent light from an opaque glass shade gave the room an uncertain quality: it was a room from which one might expect to travel, but which one could not wish to inhabit. Radiators on the walls gave out heat steadily; the fug was a little suffocating. Winifred, who never felt the cold, longed to be in Sydney, where the sea was a warm, deep blue, and bodies were burnt brown in sunlight and wind. Yellow beaches fringed the shores, and far inland were the folds of blue mountains. Leaving in Antony's car the heart of Sydney, with its traffic jam, its houses, its factories, they would follow the old bullock-tracks to isolated and serene places. Under the giant suspension bridge, ships departed to the ends of the earth. She sighed, and glanced at the darkness beyond the clinic window. From her bedroom that morning she had seen all London lie in a bowl of impenetrable gloom. On Hampstead Heath wraiths and veils of fog twisted and dissolved. Settling herself heavily in the shallow swivel-chair, she waited patiently for Angela to begin her story.

"This poor budgerigar," said Angela, opening her eyes very wide, "was in a cage. He was a blue one, with a little fat chest. Quite smooth and round. Once he had lovely tail feathers." A shadow crossed her face; her long lashes fell, veiling from

Winifred's mild attention some bewilderment. "There was a horrid little girl," she went on breathlessly. "She took the budge out of the cage, and pulled his feathers out. And then she locked him up again." She looked up challengingly. "But it didn't really matter. Because, you see, *I* came along, and when I saw the poor budge all shut up, and all his feathers gone, I was sorry for him. So I put a bandage on him— And I opened the door of the cage and let him fly out— That's the whole story," she faltered. "Do you think it's a nice one?"

"Yes, I do," said Winifred decidedly. "You're very fond of birds, aren't you?"

"Oh yes. And there's a lot more I could make up about him." Angela sat up excitedly, rocking backwards and forwards on her knees. "When he got free, all the birds popped out of the branches and sang: '*Angela's our friend*'. So I built myself a house in the forest, and lived there ever after."

"And what was the house like?"

"Oo— It was like a cuckoo clock! And it swung round on a funny little swivel. Like your chair. And I could turn wherever I wanted. And I planted—" Angela paused impressively—"bluebells all over the wood."

"Well, I think that was a splendid story. How all those creatures in the forest must love you."

"They do now," said Angela with an unchildlike smile that appeared oddly on her childish, vulnerable mouth. "Because, you see—this is where it's all so queer—the nasty little thing was me really. *I* shut the poor budge up. I wanted to hurt him. Because—because—" She frowned in a violent effort to explain what remained inexplicable—"No, I don't know why. But I hated him." Horror and dread of what remained obstinately not-to-be-spoken made her small face look peaked and old. But she lifted candid blue eyes to the wise adult who was never shocked and who never scolded. "Did you ever feel like that?" she asked wistfully.

"Good heavens, yes," Winifred told her, laughing easily to show her acceptance of an aggression that must appear

completely unexceptional. "Why, I was much more 'horrid' than you when I was your age. My brother and I were little holy terrors. Many's the time I've made my poor sister squirm by putting spiders down her back. *Big* spiders, black, hairy fellows. And she was so terrified of any sort of creepy-crawlies. Oh, I was much more horrid than you are. But now—well—you see, I'm not too bad really, am I? I've grown up quite ordinary, and little children like you always love me."

"Yes, I *do* love you," said Angela fiercely, and laid her cheek on Winifred's arm, hoping for a caress. The arm slid round her, and she snuggled into the warm tweed of Winifred's suit like an impudent but engaging young puppy. "Oh, I do love you," said Angela. "I love everybody. I'll never be such a naughty girl again."

Thumbing over her notes, as Mrs. Mainwaring's greedy little eyes fixed themselves expectantly upon her, Winifred came across the record of the dream she wanted. Angela's story of the budgerigar had rung a bell.

"I have a dream here—" Winifred tapped her note-book with one well-manicured finger—"which is very interesting. Angela told it to me quite early during her treatment—"

Mrs. Mainwaring cleared her throat and blinked. Complacent about her appearance, for she was wearing a new coat with shoulders padded like wings, and shoes that tilted her forward and jarred her spine, she doubted her ability to meet Winifred on equal terms in an intellectual conversation. However, she was anxious to do her best. "Yes, doctor?"

"It was rather an unhappy dream." Sitting pensive at her desk, Winifred appeared to consider whether she should read it aloud to Angela's mother, and then with a charming frankness read it. Mrs. Mainwaring rested her double chin on her magenta scarf and tried to look profound.

"'I was in a dark wood,'" said Winifred. "This is Angela speaking, you understand. 'I was in a dark wood, full of trees, and I couldn't see what was behind any of the trees. Then I saw birds hiding behind the branches, and I threw

stones at them and hurt them. When I had finished, the trees were all gone, and I was on a long road that led nowhere, and I had no one to ask. And I felt so lonely I began to cry.”

“Angela’s always been very fond of birds,” put in Mrs. Mainwaring helpfully. She gave a sudden giggle. “The feathery ones, of course. She doesn’t know nothing of the other kind. Not knowing the world, as you and I do—as you might say.”

“Quite,” said Winifred gravely. “But the point of this dream is that Angela was very cruel to the birds. She threw stones at them, you see, and hurt them.”

“Well, she can be a little spitfire when she wants to.” Mrs. Mainwaring patted the bun on her neck virtuously. Having worn her hair shoulder-length for as long as the film stars, she had been very unwilling to twist her hair into a coil. However, she had not visited Winifred week by week at the clinic for nothing. Sitting ponderously in the visitor’s chair, her flushed face expressionless in the milky light that seeped through the opaque glass window, she had missed no detail of Winifred’s clothes, no inflexion of her voice, no change in approach or gesture. Winifred, so obviously the lady, and a virtuous one at that, wore her hair fashionably rolled on the nape. So Mrs. Mainwaring made a date with her hairdresser. Not that Mr. Mainwaring; that lanky dumb-bell, would notice any difference, or that she cared if he did. But Mrs. Mainwaring liked to think that Dr. Orwin would appreciate the compliment.

Winifred smiled. “I know. You *have* had such a trying time with her. But the point of the dream is this. A few months ago, Angela *wanted* to hurt things, to break things, to be destructive and aggressive. And now——” Winifred told Mrs. Mainwaring the story of the budgerigar, and of Angela’s attempt at restitution.

“I see,” said Mrs. Mainwaring doubtfully. “You mean, she’s getting more friendly? Well, of course, *I* notice a great difference at home, and Miss Taylor says she’s another child at school——”

“And Miss Lawrence tells me the same thing. I think we

can congratulate ourselves on a good job of work. Angela *is* better."

"Did she tell you about her being in the play? That's a bit of a change, isn't it?"

"It is indeed." Winifred's tone was warm with respect for the mother of an up-and-coming actress. "I'm sure she'll do it very charmingly."

Mrs. Mainwaring's cheeks flushed a deeper purple. There was much she wanted to tell Winifred, but she was afraid Winifred would think her patronising. Still, something had to get itself said, if only an attempt at gratitude, and fumblingly she began to say it.

"It's like this, doctor. It all started with you giving her that blue hair-ribbon. Which was very kind, and I said so at the time, though I did say it wasn't necessary. Her father being a Civil Servant, and Angela never wants for anything." Mrs. Mainwaring, very much the married woman in her new, padded coat, paused for breath. An air of calculation narrowed her sharp eyes. "Angela was very set up with the ribbon, and nothing pleases her ladyship but off she goes to school in it. And her teacher said she looked a proper Alice, like the drawings in the books. And the long and the short of it is, they're doing the play at the end of term, and Angela, she's been chosen for the chief part. And her teacher says she's real nice in it. Anyway, doctor, she's fair set up with herself now, and not much trouble at home. And give credit where credit's due. It's all your doing." Mrs. Mainwaring nodded her head emphatically, her face glistening with the effort of so much self-expression, combined with so much honesty and tact.

"That's very kind of you to say so." Deprecatingly, Winifred lowered her eyes; her hands, controlled even in moments of relaxation, curled firmly and plumply in her lap.

"But it's true, doctor. I just can't say how pleased I am. And her father——" Mrs. Mainwaring pursed her small mouth. As a woman, she had an untroubled contempt for her husband, who was namby-pamby about his food and didn't know how to enjoy himself. The poor sap didn't even take his glass at

the local like any other woman's husband. Still, having eliminated all that, some uneasy sense remained of being outwitted; of there being a Mr. Mainwaring who lived under her roof and inhabited her husband's body, but whom she had never met. *That* Mr. Mainwaring sat up into the small hours reading books that had no sense in them (she had dipped into them once or twice in an effort to meet that stranger on his own ground); he liked music that had no tune: she came to the conclusion that he was daft. But it was *that* Mr. Mainwaring who noticed the difference in Angela and said: "The child appears to be intelligent." This was his highest term of praise. "Oh yes," his wife told Winifred resentfully, "he's getting proud of Angela now. After I've had all the handling of her—and her so tiresome. And you too," she added hurriedly. "But I wanted to tell you what he thought."

"I'm glad he approves of her."

Mrs. Mainwaring sat silent for a moment, a painful concentration of thoughts creasing the sagging flesh round her eye-sockets. The quiet figure of Winifred, head bent, hands idle in her lap, reassured some doubt. She didn't look the sort for tittle-tattle. Mrs. Mainwaring burst out: "Well, you know as well as I do, doctor, he doesn't think the likes of me good enough for him, but he can't deny Angela's the fair spit of him, and refined in her ways, if you know what I mean. And she goes to a real posh school, so her manners are better than mine are." Angry tears brimmed in her eyes. "Not that I begrudge the child that, for mine aren't what they should be, and there's no denying it." She paused, panting, and met Winifred's friendly eyes, resting on her flushed face with an expression of absorbed interest that seemed indeed quite genuine. "I'd like to feel Angela was going to be all right," she ended simply.

"I'm sure she will. You're a very careful mother." Winifred picked up the engagement diary and affected to consider. "In fact, from now on," she said slowly, "I think we might space the visits out a little more, don't you? Let me see, how often is Angela coming at present?"

"Once a fortnight, doctor."

"We'll make it once in three weeks, and slide fairly quickly to once monthly. Do you think," she asked smoothly, "Angela would be disappointed if you brought her less often?"

"Oh, no," Mrs. Mainwaring told her eagerly. "It's all happened just like what you said, doctor." She glanced a little slightly round the clinic: green, hygienic walls, staring lights, a window through which no tree rustled or cloud stirred, the orderliness of office bureau and polished chairs. "Angela's so taken up with her school now, she doesn't want any interruptions, I don't think."

"That's excellent news," murmured Winifred.

"Yes, I knew you'd be pleased." Grateful to Winifred for some abstraction—the bent head, the calm white hand poised above the engagement diary—Mrs. Mainwaring blundered on happily. "You see, while she was so difficult, she seemed to like coming along here. It was the only place where she could be naughty-like, and get away with it. And that's a fact. But now she doesn't want to be naughty so much. So she feels it a bit of a waste of time. At least," Mrs. Mainwaring shrugged, "that's how it looks to me."

"I'm sure you're right," said Winifred softly. Her resentment of this stupid woman who had by a miracle produced, and then ruined, an intelligent, sensitive child, was held automatically below the level of consciousness. But Mrs. Mainwaring, less obtuse than Winifred imagined, felt the drop in the emotional temperature. She flushed again and stammered: "Not but what she loves you, doctor. She dotes on the ground you tread on. And no wonder."

Winifred said with a pale smile: "She'll forget me. And that's as it should be. She's your child, not mine."

"Well, I'm sure, doctor——" began Mrs. Mainwaring, flustered. Ignoring Winifred's ringless hands, for in the pictures professional ladies always wore their wedding-rings hanging on a chain in a romantic place, she said with the kindest of intentions: "You've got your own children to love you, I've no doubt. I mean to say——"

"I have no children. I'm not married," Winifred told her in a clear, flat voice.

"Well, I declare——" The unfortunate Mrs. Mainwaring floundered, then with a wild welter of words struggled again to the surface. "And you so motherly! Wherever did you learn so much about children? It's a shame you haven't any of your own, it really is. And the creatures you see about with great, big families! And not wanting them at all! Well, I *am* surprised!" She wiped the sweat from her forehead, and sat staring at Winifred, handkerchief in hand. "I'm sorry if I've spoken out of my turn."

"Not at all," said Winifred wearily. "I would have told you before, but I thought you knew."

XXIV

"IT'S NO damn good, Jean. You may as well save your breath," said Carey, as he lounged in and out of the kitchen, while Jean washed up the supper dishes in the sink. "You've been going to Dr. Orwin now for over ten months, and you're no better. By this time there should be some improvement."

Jean, wrist-deep in soapy water, rubbed her eyes on the upper sleeve of her blouse. Against her will, tears trickled helplessly down her cheeks and splashed on to the bowl of dirty crockery. Through the open door of the kitchen she could see into the garden where the crab-apple tree was smothered in white blossom. Mauve lilac was full in bloom, and brown buds were appearing among the white. There were a few Lent lilies still out under the shadow of the may-tree. It was a warm April evening, nearly a year since she first visited Dr. Orwin at the consulting-room in Harley Street.

"But you don't understand, Carey." Listlessly she rinsed the soapy cups one after another under the cold tap and stood them on the rack to drain. A line of saucepans faced her, handles downwards, on a shelf level with her head. Knives and forks lay in a wet heap on the draining-board. "I've been

going to Dr. Orwin for so long, I don't know how I can do without her. I really love her." She caught her breath back on a sob; men hated displays of emotion of which they themselves were not the cause. "I can't just stop and not go any more."

Carey leant against the wall and bit hard on his pipe. The sight of Jean stooping, narrow-chested, over the sink, her hair a shapeless mess, her dress shabby under an apron splashed with gravy, aroused in him an almost uncontrollable irritation. Somewhere in the past another Jean still lived for him: charming and carefree, who rubbed a silk handkerchief over the dab of brilliantine on her 'set', who wore the palest of pink, polished nails, and who allured him in transparent night-gowns and underclothes embroidered with pink rose-buds. "I can't understand," he said thickly, "why you've changed so much."

Too tired to be tactful, Jean said recklessly, as she emptied the bowl and swilled it round with clean water: "Life's changed. We've grown older. We've got the children now. You and I don't matter so much——"

Carey swore under his breath, using words which, if she could understand them, would besmear and humiliate her. "Of all the bloody nonsense you've come out with during these last few years, that's the bloodiest. You think," he said spitefully, "because you've been going to a psychologist, that you're somebody—that you're interesting. You're too much of a damned fine lady to be human, let *me* tell *you*." Insolently he let his eyes rake her from head to foot, deliberately forcing himself to see her as she was now: drooping, discouraged, shabby, middle-aged. Then habit reasserted itself. He sat down suddenly, elbows on the kitchen table, his eyelids tight shut against the palms of his hands. He breathed heavily like a man running. "The bloodiest thing of all," he said with pain, "is that I still love you."

Jean stood irresolute, watching him. This row—and there had been so many and so many—could go on indefinitely day after day, year after year. At any moment, she could end it by going to him and cradling him in her arms. To rub her cheek against his, to sit on his knee, relaxed and unremembering, to sniff the old scent that was so unmistakably his—a mixture •

of shaving soap and strong tobacco and sweaty socks—to forget, to be nothing but an animal, unresisting to the desire of another animal: all this would clear the air with one stroke of magic. The kitchen, with its American cloth on table and dresser, its glass-fronted cupboards sheltering cartons of breakfast foods and sugar, the unwiped cooker with its grease splashes from the fried fishcakes and its crumbs of toast, were arrayed round her, menacing as a prison. Her gaolers were beyond the kitchen door, in the slanting sunlight of the garden. Johnny was astride the highest branch of the crab-apple tree, swaying dangerously and calling: “Mum! Dad! Do come and look where I am!” David was peeping out from the top of the hawthorn. (Mechanically she told herself: his knickers will get terribly torn on the prickles; his thighs will get cut.) Safe upstairs in his cot little Hugh was asleep; but in half an hour’s time she must lift him and offer him a small drink of warm barley. Carey’s hair needed cutting. As he bent forward at the table, the coarse hairs on the nape of his neck glistened. Avoiding him, she walked round to the other side of the table and sat down opposite him. ‘I must look a fright,’ she thought. Her mouth felt swollen as if bruised by a blow, and her nose was dripping.

“Now you can feel sorry for yourself,” Carey muttered savagely into his hands, not looking up. “You might try feeling sorry for me for a change, . . .”

He was feeling particularly bad about things to-day because yesterday, Friday, he had been along to see Winifred at Harley Street, and she had been unable to give him any good news about Jean’s progress. When he complained that Jean’s frigidity was, if anything, more marked than ever, she had replied vaguely that Jean was a difficult patient and that these things take time.

“But I can’t understand it,” Carey told her bluntly. “When I saw you at the beginning, you told me to leave her alone for a few months—three to six months, you said. It’s ten months now, and there’s no sign that Jean even *wants* to get better. I can’t even put an arm round her nowadays without her shuddering and getting hysterical.”

Winifred looked at him with quiet unconcern. Now that he was demobilised from the Army, Carey did not present himself to her as a figure to be taken with any great seriousness. She did not, on the other hand, dislike Carey. She considered him a vain man, indiscriminate in his friendships and needing the uncritical admiration of some woman to fortify his shaky and precarious conceit. On the occasion when he had first discussed Jean with Winifred, he had complained grievously of Jean's unsociability. He belonged to the British Legion and the Masons, the Liberal Association and the Citizens' Guild. Jean stayed at home, he said, and washed and fed babies. Winifred reminded him gently that someone had to do this, and Carey retorted that Jean might at least forget the babies when she got into bed with him at night. Winifred promised to use her influence to persuade Jean to be sensible about this. Three or six months—would Carey be able to leave Jean alone for so long a period? Carey replied that he could. It was to Carey's credit that he had waited all of ten months before seeing Winifred again. Winifred gave him full marks for this, while reserving to herself the comment that Carey was no gentleman. He had been educated at some sort of secondary school, and his speech was both ingratiating and revealing of the personal. On all these counts, Winifred could not take him quite seriously. Real people—people of her own class—clouded their feelings, and even in moments of extreme tension shrank from enthusiasm. Carey was apt to come out with any and everything, and this frank exposure of his emotional states removed him in Winifred's eyes from the real—that is, people she knew—to the status of a jerking puppet.

"Your wife is going through a difficult time," she said. She dropped her eyes to her desk and read a few lines from the top-most sheet in Jean's file. But there was no need to remind herself of the situation. Many of her patients were women of Jean's type. At the approach of middle-age, if a woman were *not* married, she would begin to realise with horror that life had passed her by, and would be appalled at the running to waste of energies and capacities that would never now find an outlet. If she *were* married, she might be tolerably satisfied,

and would never need to see a psychiatrist. But if she were married, unsatisfied and unhappy, she would probably blame the other partner of the marriage, there would be quarrels and crises, and then one of the partners would persuade or bully the other into seeking advice. Jean would never have come to Winifred but for Carey's insistence. She had her home and her children, and could have made some sort of life for herself and for them. It was Carey who was beating about in a frantic search for the illusory, unrepeatable past. What was wrong with this marriage was that *everything* was wrong with it. Jean had never loved Carey. Carey wanted, not a home, not the children, not the future, but only Jean. The two demands were incompatible.

"I can't see that Jean is so badly off now," objected Carey. The mild April evening, the quiet consulting-room with its background of olive and grey, and Winifred's tailored, compact figure in charge, all combined to give Carey the assurance of order. "It was different during the war. I was away too long . . . I don't see now why we shouldn't get back to normal."

"All the same," Winifred reminded him, "one cannot pass through these experiences unscathed."

Carey moved restlessly in his chair. Jean's unreasonableness had irked him for years. Sometimes he wondered if she weren't unbalanced. All normal women enjoyed their husbands' love-making; if they didn't, there was something odd about them. "Are you sure," he asked, trying to gather from Winifred's grave composure some hope for the future, "that she's quite normal? If she were psychotic, for instance——?"

"Oh no." Winifred's head came up swiftly, and she gave him a long look. Was there just a faint hope behind the words that perhaps Jean *was* psychotic? But there was no subtlety in the rather weather-beaten face Carey offered to her inspection. The breadth of the frontal lobes, the brilliance of the eyes, were offset by the ingratiating, too-often-smiling mouth, and he had almost no chin at all. It was a face of contradictions, in which force tapered disappointingly away into insipidity. Winifred did not think Carey would give her much trouble,

provided she stalled about Jean. She said soothingly: "Your wife is perfectly normal. Your long absences during the war were naturally upsetting." She tapped with her fingers the knob of the right-hand desk-drawer by her knee. "This—and these—" indicating the other drawers—"are full of similar cases to your own. One cannot disrupt people's lives, and then expect them to behave as if nothing had happened."

"But this frigidity," Carey pointed out, "isn't good for people. It might make Jean really ill——?"

Winifred agreed that it would be better for all concerned when the frigidity was cured. But she assured him that prolonged continence was more damaging to a man than to a woman. Deprivation of parenthood was probably more damaging to a woman, and here Jean was lucky. She had three children and she was an excellent mother. Of the two, Carey was probably suffering more than his wife. And once she was cured——

"I see." Carey's relief sounded heartfelt. "Then you think," he added hopefully, "that she may come back to what she was when we were first married?"

"As to that," Winifred said cautiously, "we shall see. You must give her time."

"All the time in the world." Carey laughed. "So long as I have something to hope for." He leaned forward confidently, shallow ruts creasing the tough skin between his brows. "What has worried me so much lately is the effect of her visits to *you*. She always comes back so depressed after seeing you . . . I can't think why."

Winifred's eyelids dropped warily. Her face fell into sharp lines, the cheeks hollow and bloodless, the lips pinched in. Even Carey, who was unable to see far into anybody—he was imperceptive in every sense—noticed that life had drained from her, leaving her harsh, recessive, old. He shifted nervously in the chair, wondering if Jean would have called him tactless as usual.

Winifred pushed back her chair and crossed to the fireplace. Primroses were dotted between their swollen and pitted leaves in crystal bowls. There were vases of daffodils and narcissi.

Putting out a hand to steady herself, she leant against the mantelpiece. One heel ground itself into the short hair of the hearthrug. "Your wife's depression," she said crisply, "is a thing she has always suffered from. She's had it from a child. About that—" she turned and faced him, her expression underlining the cold precision of her words—"I can do nothing."

"There was one thing," said Carey, looking up at last, and meeting across the kitchen table Jean's unhappy eyes, "that I really did admire about Dr. Orwin. And that was her common horse-sense. She answered my questions as fully as she could. I found out what I wanted to know." He banged a fist on the table. "That's what I liked about her. She called a spade a spade. You can say what you damn well like to a woman like that——"

"But I still—" ventured Jean in a lost, far-away voice—"don't see how I can stop going to her. . . . Just because she says I've always suffered from depression." She propped her head on her hand, running her fingers through her hair. "And it's not true," she went on helplessly. "I've had ups and downs, but I've never felt like this before."

"Well," said Carey practically, "if it *is* Dr. Orwin who causes your depression, you'd far better not see her again. It's an expensive luxury, I can tell you that much."

"I know." Jean, who had been crying off and on all day ever since Carey had suggested her visits should cease, wondered if another cup of tea would move her headache. "Oh, I don't know what to say, Carey. Why—" she lifted her burning head and flung a distraught hand across the table—"did you ever make me go to her in the first place? I *told* you it wasn't necessary. Oh, I can't just stop. Like that." She looked wildly round the small, bright kitchen as if somewhere help could come to her, but there was no help anywhere. "Carey," she cried, in her new, childish, bewildered voice that consorted so oddly with her work-worn, practical and matronly personality, "Carey—what is to become of us?"

He said, a little more gently: "We can't get into debt—depression or no depression. You'll have to let it sweat for a

bit, Jean. Perhaps, later on, if you're no better——" But privately he hoped that Jean, as he phrased it to himself, would in time learn sense. He had always in the past thought they got on pretty well together. Jean could still become the ideal wife for him, if only the sexual side of it could be straightened out. Needing her so badly, he could not admit the hopelessness of their position.

"I know what I can do," said Jean suddenly. "I'll ring up that nice Miss Bentley who's a patient of Dr. Orwin's, and ask her advice. I don't know her very well, but I like her very much, and she seems to understand so well what I feel about Dr. Orwin."

"That might help matters a bit," said Carey, and tried to recall what Jean had told him of Miss Bentley. Not that it really mattered. He was glad of any distraction that would stop Jean from crying all day, and give her something to look forward to with pleasure—and perhaps hope. But at least with pleasure. . . .

XXV

"SO CAREY says I'm not to go to her any more," concluded Jean. She sat forward in Lydia's basket-chair, leaning her cheek on her hand, and seeing nothing of the tiny bed-sitting-room in Bayswater where Lydia spent so many lonely hours.

Lydia fetched the tea-things from her cupboard under the wash-basin in the corner of the room. She pulled the screen in front of it, and sat down on a *pouffe* on the other side of the gas fire. There was a single iron bed along the window wall, a single wardrobe by the door, and a bamboo table, the wrong height for tea. It was a room whose squalor was the result, not of dirt nor of poverty, but of cynicism. The wall-paper, patterned with black trellis and pink rose-buds, was chosen for its ability to absorb ink-spots and hide stains. The bed was a cheap affair, with a pink and yellow coverlet. In the basket-

chair was a cushion, once pink, now grey. "I must apologise for my tiny room," Lydia had said, when she brought Jean up the four flights of narrow stairs from the lounge of the boarding-house. "It's a hideous little room really. But I like it because it's cheap, and there's a view." She knelt on the bed and pulled back the brief chintz curtains. Far below was a dusty oblong of grass, surrounded by a sandy path, and around that beds of privet and a cement border which had once supported spiked iron railings. Plane trees were planted at regular intervals round three sides of the square. The row of boarding-houses where Lydia lived ran along the fourth side. All around the square was the roadway, and beyond that more houses. They were all lodging-houses of a sort: apartment houses, residential hotels, and lower-grade clubs. "I can look out of my window and see the sky and the tree-tops," said Lydia. "We're only a hundred yards from Kensington Gardens. I don't look at the brickwork between."

"I envy you being so near good shops," said Jean, looking round for something to praise among all this dreariness. The tawdry little bungalow on the outskirts of Croydon, she thought, was heaven compared with this majestic decay.

"You don't really," said Lydia sombrely. "You've got a charming little house, and every single room in it is your own."

There was no answer to this. Jean slipped out of her coat and sank back gratefully in Lydia's basket-chair. It was strange to let her hands lie idly in her lap while another woman spread a cloth, and put the kettle on the gas-ring, and brought out crockery from a built-in cupboard below the wash-basin. Lydia, she noticed, moved hesitantly, as if not sure where to put the cups. From a paper bag she brought out some cakes, one by one, and moved them round on the plate, dissatisfied with something. Jean could not tell what. Jean's own nervous, rapid movements among food and china, her ability to keep porridge or sauces from sticking to the saucepan, her awareness of the children's actions all the time she stirred puddings and minced the joint, struck her for the first time as skills—which another woman, Lydia for instance, might never have acquired.

"I'm sorry there's such a poor tea," said Lydia at last. She seemed unable to move away or settle to conversation. She stood by the bamboo table, and looked sadly at the one plate of cakes, the small jug of milk. "If I'd known earlier you were coming I might have done something about it. In a boarding-house," she said vaguely, straightening the knives yet again, "you're very dependent on the servants."

"Do sit down," Jean urged her gently. "You look all in. I feel I ought not to have come to-day and worried you with my troubles."

Lydia sat down on the *pouffe*. If she was glad to see Jean, exhaustion rather than enthusiasm lay like a weight behind her welcome. The tea was insipid, the cakes light but tasteless. She was in no hurry to talk, and did not ask Jean why she had come.

Accepting a second cup of tea, Jean said abruptly, because she was nervous: "I really wanted to ask you something about Dr. Orwin."

"Did you?" Lydia clasped her hands round her knees and bent her neck. Her face, foreshortened from the brow, was no longer accessible to sympathy, and there was no mistaking her tone and gesture of blank detachment.

"Of course, if you'd rather not talk about her——?" suggested Jean, at a loss.

"Oh, I don't mind. . . ." Lydia's head sank lower. But her breast swelled as if she breathed with difficulty, and the detachment exposed itself as a brittle shield behind which she drooped under a burden too great to carry. Beside Jean, who was nearly ten years younger, she looked immature and fragile. Dark where Jean was fair; perplexed where Jean was stolid; capable of direct response as a child is capable, but more resigned, with the resignation that is close to despair.

Jean put down her cup. "Look," she said, willing Lydia's averted cheek to turn once more towards her. She had the helpless feeling that Lydia had gone distant from her: suffering, wordless, almost rigid in her self-imposed detachment. "I want to ask you a very funny question. Perhaps you'll think I'm mad. . . . But I do want to know what Dr. Orwin is

like. I want to know what *you* think she's like." She spoke as if the two questions were synonymous.

Lydia looked up at her then. It was a long look, almost impersonal in its compassion; a look of complete understanding. Jean broke out: "But I ought not to be bothering you. It's you who are not well. Oh, I'm sure you're not well——" For she was a little horrified in her maternal feelings by the older woman's tired skin and hollowed temples, and the suffused, unquiet eyes. And Lydia's look of suffering was *bone-deep*. It expressed itself in her sagging shoulders and tensely clasped hands, and the way she lifted her head as if the effort were too great, and perhaps her head was literally too heavy with pain, or was hot with some fever. But chiefly Jean noticed the clasped hands. They were extraordinarily large and powerful for one who was so slight, but their look of power was entirely due to the long bones of the fingers, and the reach from the base of the thumb to the outer edge of the palm. There was very little flesh on the hands, and the fan of bones from the wrists was obscured by the cord-like veins that stood out in high relief under the finely creased and shining skin. They were beautiful hands, but almost indecently anatomical.

"Why do you want to know about Dr. Orwin?" asked Lydia at last. She dropped her eyes and went on in her cool, mocking, but somehow friendly way that reassured the distressed and anxious Jean. "If there's anything I can do to help, I'll be glad to——" She sounded utterly indifferent to her own state.

"Because I can't understand her. Because she makes me so dreadfully unhappy. Because she hates me." Jean brought this out with a rush, and in spite of herself her eyes brimmed with uncontrollable tears. She blinked them back furiously, for she knew what was due to her manners, and that it was quite unpardonable to go to another woman's house and make her miserable by crying. But Lydia seemed to notice nothing. There was a stillness about her which made it possible in her presence to be unashamed of grief. "You *are* sweet to me," Jean discovered, dabbing her eyes. "You don't seem to mind

my coming here and making a fool of myself like this." She picked up the cup and made another effort to finish her tea.

Lydia, between concern and a smile, said: "Why shouldn't you cry if you want to? I often do. Not—" she added almost to herself—"that it ever does much good. I shed all the tears I was capable of long ago. With Dr. Orwin—" here her voice hardened—"weakness is a mistake. She battens and grows fat on it. Fools like you and me are easy meat for her. . . . Why," she asked with sudden anger, "do you go to her at all?"

"Because Carey sent me." Jean stared back at Lydia in surprise. The question had been almost a declaration of war.

Lydia shrugged her shoulders. "More fool you. Now for people like me—" She waved her hand contemptuously, drawing Jean's attention to the poky room of which all that could be said had already been said. Through the window one saw the pale, smoke-blue patch of London sky.

"But don't you admire her?"

"Admire?" Lydia dismissed this as irrelevant. "People like me get drawn into the mutual admiration society." She smiled slightly and looked back to the gas fire. That was what the Harley Street consulting-room was for if one could only see it; but *really* see it, so that one's knowledge could be applied to one's life. "But you—why should you join this society of humiliated and unwanted females? You're married, aren't you? And you have three children? And a charming house? You have more important things to live for."

At this new aspect of her case Jean grew thoughtful. She was a little offended and a little exhilarated by Lydia's directness. Expecting she hardly knew what, possibly sympathy, possibly just someone to talk to, she had found a challenge. Lydia, for some reason that was not clear to Jean, was on Carey's side. But certainly not because she cared about money, or because she wanted Jean's exclusive affection. Jean, struggling through the blinding mist of her own misery, became aware of some implacable force in Lydia which, though it rendered Lydia more vulnerable, was for herself an offer of strength. Lydia talked as one who had lost a fight

which should have been won; with what remained to her of interest in the outcome she was urging Jean to leave the battlefield before she too sank before the superior force of the enemy.

"But why do you think of Dr. Orwin as an enemy?"

"Isn't she?" Lydia laid her head down on her arms. The pale reflection of the sunless sky, bright with a spring that could not bloom in these dusty squares of privet and sooty plane, filled her small room with clear, unsunny light. Jean could not but be surprised that Lydia was content with a room so utterly unlike herself. Too big, too garish, the roses cavorted and made senseless shapes up the wall. There was a gurggle somewhere behind one corner where a low brown door led into the bowels of the house. Lydia's room was known in the boarding-house as the cistern annexe.

"No, I don't think so." Jean's face, with its broad, flattened nostrils and unsubtle mouth, wrinkled with the effort to understand what Lydia was getting at. Her hands lay clenched in her lap, palms upward. Her skirt, unsuitably short, but she wore it because a tailor-made was so right for town, rode up at the knee, and displayed too much artificial silk stocking. She had knots of varicose veins below the knee, the result of too much standing during her pregnancies.

"Why did you come and see me?" asked Lydia suddenly.

"I came," said Jean truthfully, "because I'm so uncertain what is the best thing to do. You see, I've been going to Dr. Orwin now for over ten months. At first it was like heaven. I thought I'd never met anybody so wholesome and so sweet——"

"And then you found yourself caught in a trap," interrupted Lydia. "You can neither go on with her, nor go back. It's the hell of a predicament." Her composure broke up suddenly. She looked up at Jean with frightened and imploring eyes. "I know, because I'm going through the same thing myself."

Shocked out of her self-absorption, Jean cried: "Then what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know. I wrote to her before Christmas and told her I wasn't coming back any more. But I couldn't stay the

course. And now I'm worse than ever, and I can't break away——" Lydia shook her head and lapsed back into silence, locking her fingers. The backs of her hands, thin-fleshed and agitated, were knotted with gleaming and swollen veins. Jean looked round helplessly. Against this pitiful room, this cynical poverty of charm, she could suggest nothing sensible that would appear to meet Lydia's need. The boarding-house seemed to Jean a frightful place. How, she wondered, could anyone call this barracks, this rabbit-warren— clichés crowded in her mind—home? But, of course, Lydia might have lived at these places too long to notice her surroundings. . . .

In this supposition, however, Jean was wrong. Lydia detested Bayswater. Moving at long intervals from one boarding-house to another, she had come to recognise in them all a common denominator of rootlessness. Her furniture was the discarded rubbish of other, and more fortunate, people's homes; and as for food, there were the same dreary vegetables, the same monotonous menus, everywhere. You knew what you would be eating this time next week, and so on through the years. Not, she thought, that that mattered at all. It amazed her, on the few occasions when she sat downstairs in the evening, to find how concerned all the other boarders were with the subject of food. They had endless criticisms and suggestions.

But they were an odd lot, she thought, altogether. It was on the whole a 'young' house, and most of its population was out at jobs during the day. It came to life in fits and starts during the morning. The young men dashed in to breakfast, very tidy in their City suits, and ate solidly and fast, hunched over the small, crowded tables. The young women toyed with toast and cups of tea, and rather ostentatiously refused dried egg or curled tail bits of haddock. By nine o'clock the business contingent was away, and the older folk strolled in to take their breakfast with dignity and time off for gossip. Newspapers were unfolded from the backs of chairs, and occasional items read aloud and greeted with polite scepticism or approval. There were more women than men, more spinsters and widows than wives. But one and all were in greater or lesser degree

rootless. They had possessed homes once, or hoped to acquire homes in the future. Or they had jobs which obliged them to live in town, but longed to escape to the country. Or, if they were young enough, they regarded this boarding-house as an amusing and temporary squatting, from which at any moment they might escape without regret. They grumbled, talked 'big', and lived either in the past or the future. For Lydia, who had spent all the best years of her life in such houses as this, the past and the future had ceased to have any meaning. After the age of thirty, she had not allowed herself to think very far. It is possible to numb one's feelings, to deny one's wishes and fears, until one is almost sure that these inconvenient feelings and urges are dead. Lydia, who had once hoped to play at concerts and had known the agony of unfulfilled creative talent, now turned up morning by morning at her office, and got through her letters, and returned to the usual smoke and gabble of the dining-room, and went early to bed; heavily and dreamlessly sleeping the empty nights away.

Until Winifred disturbed the pattern. . . .

Lydia said to Jean: "I don't think, if you got across her, she'd show you any mercy."

"But why?" Jean shrank a little in her chair, almost as if some material, malevolent presence had invaded the commonplace bedroom. "Besides—I don't want to get across her." Her eyelids reddened and she said childishly: "I don't want to leave her at all."

"Don't you?" Lydia looked up with a strange smile. She was staring at Jean with wide-open, dark-pupilled eyes, full of a cold, dancing mockery that was utterly alien to laughter. "Listen. I'll give you the best advice any friend could give you. And if you're not more of a fool than I think you, you'll take it——"

Jean put out a hand to stop her. "You don't mean——?"

"I mean," said Lydia sternly, "get out. No, don't interrupt me——" For Jean was starting to protest. "Get away from Dr. Orwin while you can. And stay away. She'll never do you any good. Good?" She laughed unsteadily. "She's the sort of woman who'll eat the heart out of you. And at the end of it

you'll be no nearer what you want than you were at the beginning."

"You frighten me," faltered Jean. And indeed Lydia seemed to be speaking wildly. Carey had said he admired Dr. Orwin because she had so much common sense. Could Dr. Orwin be two people, whom Lydia and Carey isolatedly knew? And if so, which was the real Dr. Orwin? In which of them did Jean herself believe? She could not tell.

"I hope I do frighten you," said Lydia sombrely. "Look! Take a good look round this room. And then imagine a house of rooms like this. And then a district. And whole towns——"

Jean looked obediently. "It's not exactly exciting——" She stopped, a little aghast at this, for her, unusual lapse from manners.

"Exciting?" Lydia jumped to her feet. "Come with me." She pulled Jean from the chair, and dragged her to the window. "You can see all those boarding-houses round the square. And there are hundreds and hundreds of them, and hundreds of tiny flatlets where women like me live." She touched Jean's arm with one thin finger. "*We're* the sort of people who flock to Dr. Orwin. And why do you think *we* go?"

Jean shook her head.

"Sit down again," said Lydia impatiently. She crossed to the door and turned the key. "*We* go," she said, slipping to the hearthrug and leaning her head wearily against the *pouffe*, "because we've had damn-all out of life, and we think she'll show us what there is left to live for." Lydia closed her eyes with the palms of her hands and shivered, turning her cheek so that it pressed on to the glazed chintz. "Tears?" she murmured, so low that Jean failed to catch some of the words. "You think that a few tears, and perhaps a breakdown thrown in, will change Dr. Orwin from what she is to what you would like her to be? Things don't happen like that, Mrs. Martin, and if they did, they wouldn't happen to you and me. There's only one way you'll get what you want out of Dr. Orwin, and that's to make her respect you. Well, it's easy for you. You've got a husband and children and she knows there's no getting over that. That's why she can't forgive you. . . . And I—well, I've

got something too, although I may find I can't bring it off, and if I do, it may not work the way I want it. . . . But *you* don't need to worry. You've got everything. And why you can't let it rest at that, I don't know. I've given you the best advice anyone could give you, and if you're wise you'll take it. 'Leave Dr. Orwin while you can still get away from her intact. And stay away. I wish to God,'" she said, laying the back of her hand against her burning forehead, and lifting dry and glittering eyes to Jean's horrified and pitiful face, "that I were strong enough—and sensible enough—to take my own advice."

"But I've always thought she liked me," objected Jean, impressed by Lydia's passionate sincerity, but unable to make so complete a *volte-face* from her previous uncritical certainty of Winifred's benevolence towards her. "That is—I did till recently. But it's true—I think now she hates me." Her tears welled up again and she pulled her handkerchief out of her pocket. By now it was a mere grubby cotton ball, but she was past caring for the imperatives of the laundry. "I can't think why. I haven't done *anything* to her."

"No, you haven't *done* anything," said Lydia, lapsing into her former remoteness and closing her eyes. "It's what you *are*. . . . Don't you understand? Women like her and me . . . Oh, I understand her all right. In a way, I'm sorry for her. I know what it is to be hurt by life. To know you've missed the best. To be blankly and completely rejected—— so that you feel there's no place for you. . . . Dr. Orwin is like that. Women like us live always on the margin. We're free, and I suppose, in a way, you envy us. But there isn't any need, because we hate our freedom. We can do what we like, but there's nothing worth doing—— go where we want, but there's nowhere worth going. We'd rather be tied, like you, to hard, monotonous work. To have our bodies broken up in childbirth. To be wanted and needed. Yes, I know your life with the children often tires and exhausts you, but it's exciting and rewarding as well. I'd gladly change with you. Anything but this utter sense of loss—this terrifying freedom——"

"I'm awfully sorry," said Jean, bewildered. "I didn't under-

stand. You see, you and Dr. Orwin are so clever compared with me."

"Clever?" Lydia spoke with contempt. "Exactly where does that get us? If you mean, do I try to write music——?"

"Write it?" Jean sat up surprised. "No, I didn't know that. . . . I thought you were a pianist."

"I don't write much," said Lydia, and sat silent. For a few moments only the flare of the jets in the gas fire and the muted cacophony of distant traffic behind the high Bayswater terraces sounded through the tiny room.

Jean studied Lydia with new interest. Always until now her own relationship with Dr. Orwin had seemed to her so important that she had hardly seen Lydia as a separate individual. Lydia was just another patient. Lydia's business occupation and her status in the boarding-house had not really existed in Jean's estimate of her. She was, now Jean came to think of it, a typist. Jean knew the City, because Carey worked there, and occasionally he met her there and took her to lunch. So many people, sitting almost knee to knee and eating together, worried Jean, who preferred the suburbs, where people seemed to have more time. The City of the better-class restaurants and the railway hotels was unknown to her. She tried to imagine Lydia hurrying along the narrow pavements of Fenchurch Street, or fighting through the good-humoured but determined crowds that swarm into the Tubes. But she could not see Lydia in such a *milieu*. Lydia's air of abstraction, the slight, uncertain movements of her hands, her ready relapse into irony, presented a personality whose brittleness would not stand up easily to the rough give-and-take of commerce. On the other hand, it was easy to imagine Lydia at a piano. But then, Jean reminded herself, she had both heard and seen Lydia play, and she had never seen her at work. "By the way," she asked, looking round as if she expected a piano to emerge suddenly, like the china, out of some cubby-hole, "where do you do your practice?"

"At a studio near here," said Lydia dreamily. "But, as I said—I don't do much actual playing nowadays."

"Oh, but you should," cried Jean, and forgot for the moment

the shadow of Dr. Orwin, which till now had presided at this interview.

"No. At my age, one cannot become a performer," said Lydia. "It's funny," she continued in such a low voice that Jean could hardly catch what she said. "I hadn't thought about music for years and years until lately. It wasn't until I'd been going to Dr. Orwin for several visits that I felt the urge to play again." She lifted her hands and examined them as if they were strangers, flexing and unflexing her long fingers. "My hands are stiff. I can't play like I used to."

"And yet you hired a piano?" prompted Jean.

"Oh, that." For the first time, Lydia smiled shyly. "No, I didn't hire the piano for that reason." She had the habit, Jean noticed, of drooping her head a little on one side when she was being talked of. She did not seem to be very aware of herself as a person. She seemed to stand aloof, considering herself without enthusiasm and without concern. She was an odd person altogether. Obviously she did not belong in this garish rose-trellised little room. Nor could Jean see her very well among the self-assertive boarding-house crowd downstairs. Jean knew their type; she had summed them up quickly enough while waiting for Lydia in the lounge. The City was not Lydia's spiritual home either.

"Then why did you hire it?" asked Jean.

Lydia evaded this. "Why does one do anything?" Her listless tone, her slack posture, put a distance between them, forbidding Jean to trespass. But Jean only said humbly: "I've always remembered how you played to the children that Sunday you came over. Do you remember? You made up a story, and then you made up tunes and rhymes, and the whole thing fitted in. Like a play. The children were so terribly thrilled. 'Just like the wireless,' they said afterwards. 'Only we got it to ourselves.' I've always remembered that. I've often thought you ought to make up things for the B.B.C. yourself."

"But that's just what I have done," cried Lydia suddenly, and lifted to Jean a face so pale, so distorted with pain, that, involuntarily, Jean leant forward and put a hand on Lydia's shoulder. Lydia was trembling. Her eyes glittered, but no

tears came. Her hands, nervously clasping and unclasping each other, were pressed tightly to her throat. She did not repel Jean's caress, but she did not relax her tension against Jean's arm. Then she turned away, and Jean noticed how in profile part of Lydia's personality suffered an eclipse. Disturbed, perplexed, Jean did not know what to say. The conversation, begun so innocently with a question about a piano, had touched, some deeper issue of which Jean knew nothing. Fearful of saying something stupid, Jean hesitated, withdrew her arm, and then asked, trying to make her voice sound natural: "Did the B.B.C. refuse it, then?"

"They didn't *refuse* it," said Lydia bitterly. She bit her lip and seemed unwilling to say more. Jean sat patiently in the basket-chair, frowning a little, but realising that anything she could think of to say would probably be the wrong thing. She took refuge in silence.

"Oh, it's all very well for you," exclaimed Lydia at last. "You come here and tell me you've got involved with Dr. Orwin, and you don't know how the hell you've going to get free of her. But what about me?" She glanced significantly round the mean little bedroom. "I've got nothing! Nothing! She's got everything. Money. Position. Power." She narrowed her eyes and looked straight at Jean. "What I am, you see. But what you don't see—" she shook her hand impatiently—"is what I've been trying to do all this long, long winter."

"You mean——?"

"To write something. I don't know. . . . To get something out of my system perhaps." She drooped forward again despondently and went on more quietly: "Dr. Orwin wanted to be a musician herself once. Did you know that?"

"Yes. She told me once——"

"Well, she couldn't have been very good. You see, I know her type so well. But the point is, she *tried*. And when she couldn't do that, she tried other things. And failed at them all. So she came to psychiatry as a last resort. That's why she can't ever be natural with a patient. She's always got to keep a patient *down*."

"But how," asked Jean, a little aghast at this show of

insight, "can you go on liking her if you think that about her?"

"It's easy." Lydia spoke with contempt. "She's got no nerves. Or rather, she's highly-strung, but she controls herself and never lets her feelings interfere with her life. My nerves are so unreliable I can't trust myself with her or without her. That's why I was building all my hopes on this B.B.C. script. I thought it was good," she added wistfully. "If I could have got something on the air, she'd have had to have taken notice of me. I'd have been somebody at last. Perhaps—" she smiled shakily—"she'd even have discovered I was an asset to have as a patient. I'd have enjoyed giving her the surprise."

"But perhaps it will be accepted yet," suggested Jean, struggling to retain a foothold in all this, and still haunted by the earlier Madonna-like image of Winifred.

"I'm so tired of waiting." There were tears in her voice, but Lydia's eyes were hard and bright. "No, I don't think so now. I sent my script in—let me see—more than ten weeks ago." She leant back against the *pouffe* and closed her eyes against the light.

It all seemed rather hopeless. Jean, who knew the right words to compose the sudden, flaring quarrels between her children, and who under pressure from Carey could slide over difficult situations with adroitness, threw a look of appeal to her hostess. It seemed a few centuries ago that she had stood before her wardrobe mirror, hesitating between the tweed coat and the cloth suit, and asking Carey anxiously if her hair would 'do'. Carey had made her walk to the door and turn round slowly, and she stood, feeling a little ridiculous, under his thoughtful scrutiny. He suggested she should wear her ear-clips and told her she had nice legs. It all looked so ordinary in retrospect. She discovered, with a little stab of surprise, that she was looking forward to hearing Carey's opinion of Lydia when she arrived home. She wondered if Lydia's script really had been good. It was incredible that Dr. Orwin of all people should be so mean and so jealous as Lydia made out. Yet both she and Lydia had been made so very unhappy.

"I wish you would tell me what your script was about," said Jean.

"I could read you the synopsis," agreed Lydia, a little reluctantly, but she dragged herself to her feet, unlocked her wardrobe, and brought out a suitcase hidden in the corner behind her clothes. She unlocked this too, and displayed some bundles of manuscript tied up in string, and a parcel of sheet music closely dotted with her fine and delicate musical script. "I hope you won't think me too terribly stupid," she apologised, and extracted one sheet. "This is the carbon of the synopsis I sent the B.B.C. It will give you an idea."

Jean, dubious of her capacities as critic, but flattered and bursting with goodwill towards her so much more unfortunate hostess, leant forward in the creaking wicker chair, and prepared to concentrate. Lydia's voice, monotonous at first, warmed to enthusiasm as she read aloud to Jean her synopsis of *Spring and Fall*.

"'And so he came back to his starting-place'" (Lydia concluded) "'after a whole series of incredible adventures. He knew the world and its deceptions. He had experienced joy, grief, the thrill of power, and the sickness of despair. And when he saw the small house and garden where he had been born, he thought: There was something here which I have never recaptured. And he wandered through the rooms and sat down on the grass in the garden. He thought: From now on I shall learn once again to be content. But he was not content. For, although he was re-acting the memories of his childhood, he was no longer a child. He could not see again through a child's eye. And there was a bed of spring flowers in full bloom: narcissi, Lent lilies and hyacinths. And behind them rose banks of fresh spring leaves, in which birds were building. He looked intently at the garden which he had never truly seen since he was ten years old. (For he was absorbed by outward-looking. Success, remorse, ends and means, and the problems of human relationships.) And he exclaimed: "This is the Golden Grove": recapturing his childhood's innocence of eye. For it is true that when we cease to be children our hearts die a little. And long before our physical death we are like the

zombies of Haitian lore—corpses, animated by witchcraft for a time. A great teacher once said of the children: Suffer them to come unto Me, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. But like most profound truths, we have never truly accepted this. . . . It is hard when one is old to learn to see again, freshly and alertly as a child sees. But if we strip ourselves of our preoccupations, and refuse to be blinded by habit or engrossed by care, we can learn to look and listen and feel again with a child's awareness. . . . So he looked at the garden as he had once looked at it when he was a child. And all the garden absorbed colour, exuded warmth, and lay around him in the clear and tender air that landscapes once wore, and which he had never expected to see or feel again.'

"My hero," Lydia explained, looking up from the synopsis on her knee, "worshipped success. He spent his whole life trying to be somebody. But as fast as successes crowded on him, as they did, he could see new fields of enterprise which he had not yet attempted. And he never felt safe, because always success seemed to be round the next corner——"

"Aren't you trying to describe Dr. Orwin?" interrupted Jean.

Lydia gave her a look of astonishment. So much of herself had been written into this script that, reading it again, she found in it scenes and characters which she had not planned. Words had crept into the text which did not seem to be her own words, for they said both more and less than she had intended. The work was good; or abysmally bad. She could not tell which. She only knew that by writing this script she was easing her mind of some burden. Out of the mouths of babes. . . . She marvelled that of all people Jean should be the one to point to an interpretation that had not occurred to her, and yet which seemed so essentially right. For to Lydia the play had seemed an allegory of her own life. Could it be that she had totally identified herself with Dr. Orwin?

The script had taken her only two months to write. This included the incidental music, for which she had been obliged to hire the piano. But, looking back, she could see that the tunes first began to shape themselves and the dim outline of

the story to appear at least six months earlier. It was during her early sessions with Dr. Orwin that the old discontent broke through her numbed faculties, and she felt, at first incoherently, but later with urgency, a desire to shape her experience into the solacing rhythms of music and words. It was no longer possible for her to go back into the past and take up again her piano practice where she left it twenty-odd years ago. But those twenty wasted years had been full of other and varied experiences. Under the compulsion of her love for Dr. Orwin, these experiences moved in her mind and took on value and distinction. She longed to share them with Dr. Orwin: to invite her to the vicarious enjoyment of so much that was strange and important.

So during the long winter evenings she worked at her script, and when she was satisfied she had done all she could, she had it copied and sent to the B.B.C. That was at the end of January. She steeled herself not to expect a reply before the end of a month or six weeks. But two months, and then nearly three, went by, and she heard nothing. Meanwhile, she made no headway with Winifred, who grew steadily more distant, and who, by subtle withdrawals of interest, managed to convey how little she was impressed by Lydia's personality and pre-occupations. The strain of this relationship and the dread of failure were beginning to sap the foundations of Lydia's self-control. Already at her sessions she felt an almost unbearable urge to throw herself at Winifred's feet and compel from her some gesture or word of affection. She longed for some reassurance that she was not for ever and utterly rejected. So far, her fear that her very need for reassurance would provoke from Winifred a final rejection had kept her silent. But she knew she was at the end of her tether. Unless she could hold Winifred's interest by some tangible proof of success—the acceptance of her work, for instance—she knew her self-control would break, and she would be utterly at Winifred's mercy. Was it for this reason that some projection of her situation stood out so clearly in her play that even Jean could recognise it? Jean, Lydia well knew, was the least subtle of critics and might be expected to miss even the obvious. But her situation,

so similar to Lydia's own, had softened Jean and made her more perceptive.

Lydia said at last: "Perhaps you're right. Perhaps it *is* Dr. Orwin." She let the sheets of white manuscript flip back under her thumb, hardly noticing the black, compact phrases of typescript that sprang to view, and that would have recalled whole chapters of experience streaming away into oblivion. By her side lay the open suitcase half full of papers. The door of the cheap little wardrobe stood ajar, and three or four dark dresses hung huddled together, leaving ample space round for all her other possessions. Lydia possessed very little. Her dresses were short, and tidily disposed over the hangers, as if in this phase of Lydia's life there still lingered the discipline of the school-room.

Jean shifted uneasily in the basket-chair. She was immensely impressed by Lydia's story, and wholly without envy. The precariousness and isolation of Lydia's life shocked her. Carey's pipe; children's garments blowing on the line, while the sun shone and early butterflies darted over the gooseberry bushes; her own fingers, pulpy and swollen, as she swilled the hot suds in the washing-up bowl; her best china tea-set, glinting in the sunlight on Sunday afternoons when all the family were together for tea—these were by comparison real and comfortable things. For all her admiration of Lydia's superior talents and ambitions, Jean could not wish to exchange any part of their divergent lives. But she conceded to Lydia an absolute superiority over herself. She could not understand how Dr. Orwin could fail to be impressed by Lydia's cleverness. There was no doubt whatever about that. "I especially like," said Jean suddenly, "that bit about the garden, Why he called it 'The Golden Grove', I mean."

"Do you?" Lydia looked up shyly. "That phrase wasn't my own really." She slid a hand under the papers in the suitcase and brought out a thin blue book. "These poems by Hopkins have always haunted me. You'll find about 'Goldengrove' in the 'Spring and Fall'. And there's another. It's rather terrible, I think. It's about the coming of spring . . . fertility. . . . 'Send my roots rain'. . . . Gardens," said Lydia dreamily,

"have always been a symbol of love. . . . Do you like poetry?"

Jean shook her head. She had never cared for poetry at all. It seemed such a silly and affected way of saying what everybody knew. She hadn't much time to read anything nowadays anyway. If she put her feet up and opened a novel, Hugh would probably start crying, or there'd be a knock at the door; and when she'd finished with the tradesman, or the friendly little wife across the way who couldn't cook, and settled back to her story-book, it would be time to put the kettle on for tea. Jean was not sorry she had never taken to books; she had her hands full with more immediate necessities. Still, she recognised that clever people must be allowed more esoteric satisfactions. She opened the book respectfully.

"Don't read it now," said Lydia in a different voice, and put a hand over Jean's. She sat listening, then glanced in alarm towards the door. "This sounds like a visitor for me."

Steps were indeed approaching. Someone was mounting the stairs, and they both waited, though why Lydia should expect a visitor Jean could not tell. She supposed there would always be strangers coming and going in a boarding-house.

"I'm the top room," explained Lydia. "No one tramps all the way up here except to see me." She replaced her manuscript in the suitcase and slipped the case into the wardrobe. Then she unlocked the door. •

XXVI

TO THE surprise of both of them, Maisie Lawrence was standing on the mat, knuckles raised to tap for admission. She broke at once into apologies, but appeared to be in no doubt of her welcome. Sweeping into the room, a haggard and elegant stranger, she took the younger women by storm, and was handing round cigarettes, praising the view, expressing her astonishment at the sight of Jean, and installing herself in

the one and only chair, before either of her hostesses could slip in a word. She had an hour to spare, and thought it would be charming if she could look up Lydia and see how she was getting on. She was so glad to renew Jean's acquaintance too. Lydia and Jean, dumb with speculation, stared at their unexpected guest, and wondered just what it was that endeared her to Dr. Orwin. They sat down on the bed, side by side, and tried to work it out.

No one could call Maisie secretive. Never able to forget for long her beloved Winifred, she plunged into an excited and detailed account of her previous week-end, which, it appeared, she had spent almost entirely in Winifred's company. Dinner and the ballet on Friday. A picnic in Hertfordshire on Saturday. Handel's Water Music at the Abbey on Sunday. There had been some delay at the consulting-room on the Friday evening, and dinner could only be a snack. Winifred had been kept by some tiresome husband who sat out a whole hour talking about his dim wife—a poor little thing from the suburbs. . . . But the picnic was a success. Maisie had provided the food, and Winifred laughingly protested that she would be subsisting on Maisie's butter and sugar ration for the rest of the week. The Water Music at the Abbey was not so good. Maisie preferred a full orchestra to the organ and Winifred agreed. Not, laughed Maisie, that Winifred knew anything about music, poor darling, but she always had to pretend she did. It was the same with the ballet. Winifred stated her views, and made play with a few elementary technical terms: the *pas de deux*, her preference for classical over character, and her admiration of the ballerina's 'really prodigious elevation'. When she departed from the obvious, however, Winifred got herself tied up in knots. She spoke of the 'choreography' when she meant the '*décor*', and she had experienced great difficulty in suppressing a yawn through most of the Stravinsky. Why she had to pretend to know something about everything was a mystery to Maisie. But then she was so terribly shallow, poor sweet, Maisie told them indulgently.

Jean listened with a growing uneasiness of horror and

incredulity. For the second time this afternoon she was being shown another facet of Dr. Orwin's extraordinary personality. The Madonna was being assaulted on all sides. Where Carey found only common sense, Lydia found warped virginity, and Maisie an amusing social flair. All of them, it seemed, found in Winifred some reflection of their own predominant attitude to life. Was the Madonna, too, merely a reflection of Jean's own maternal instinct? And if so, where among all these whirling fantasies of friends and patients was the real Dr. Orwin? Had she any genuine personality of her own at all? And if not, to what could one cling in the uncertainty and hazard of a psychological upheaval? Not able to put much of this into words, Jean was nevertheless profoundly disturbed. She had come here to ask Lydia what would happen to her if Carey obliged her to discontinue her treatment. Now she began to wonder what would happen to her if she were allowed to go on.

Lydia said nothing. She sat on the end of her bed, cradling her elbows in her fingers and seemingly absorbed in the tiny, swaying movements of her feet, that dangled one inch above the floor. Only the top of her dark head was visible, drooping sideways in a gesture that dissociated her from the spinning discs of Maisie's imagination—the flow of dancers weaving multi-coloured gestures in front of black curtains; the green-grey lanes of Hertfordshire, hazy in April afternoon light; Winifred, by Maisie's side, listening to music in the Abbey, or touching fingers accidentally as they discussed food and wine over dinner in some unpublic restaurant. It was hard for Lydia not to feel envy as she sat there in her ugly little bedroom, conscious in every nerve of Maisie's arrogant charm and the shrill confidence of Maisie's voice telling her this and that about Winifred. She could see very clearly through Maisie's eyes Winifred's small house of white and buff-coloured stone, the cool lounge with the damasked chairs where Maisie sat, and the walled garden through the french window, with its pergola and row of guardian elms. The little crystal clock ticked for her, and the polished door of the cocktail cabinet swung open; glasses and bottles glittered as

Winifred, rising to reach for a cigarette, switched on the standard lamp, and a hoop of honey-coloured light held Maisie and Winifred together in one enchantment that Lydia would never break. "I had no idea," she told Maisie, "that Dr. Orwin invited patients home." "Didn't you?" asked Maisie, surprised. "Oh yes, she told me she often has patients to her house, if she thinks it will do them good. She's rather proud of her house, you know. It's very artistic——" One visit, Lydia told herself, if she had only been asked for one visit—one visit would be enough. But Dr. Orwin had never asked her. Maisie and Dr. Orwin were on christian-name terms. They explored Hampstead together, they booked seats for the ballet, they drove through Hertfordshire and picnicked below beeches, sitting on the running-board of the car.

"But I thought," said Jean, who liked to feel sure she understood things, "that you and Dr. Orwin were *friends*."

Maisie, nervously flattening her cigarette between claw-like fingers, denied this. "She won't make friends with a patient. 'A friendly doctor is better than a doctor friend.' Hasn't she ever told you that?"

"Jean," said Lydia, addressing Maisie for the first time, "doesn't know what she's up against." This quiet statement, so final in its resignation, had the effect of silencing both her visitors. Having made it, Lydia looked down again at the floor, withdrawing herself equally from Jean's distress and Maisie's flaunting pretence of pleasure. The spell of sincerity held them for a moment in an unbroken ring.

Then Maisie flung back her head and squared her angular shoulders. "If you're hoping to make a friend of Winifred," she told Jean sharply, "you'd better accept the truth once and for all. She's not *your* sort." She nodded towards Lydia. "Nor yours either." She smiled at them both, between affection and exasperation. "Why, she's not even your generation. She's mine. We're ten and more years older than you two." She spread out her arms, confronting to their crass stupidity her taut, light body, frail with ill-health and age. "This is where Winifred belongs. She's a darling Victorian spinster, with enough text-book knowledge to float a battleship.

But less experience of life than either of you. Or me either, for that matter. And that's saying something. Besides——" she broke off, eyeing them both shrewdly, "there are only three things in life that Winifred really cares for——" she ticked them off on her fingers. "Fame; frivolity; fortune. If you can provide her with those, she'll accept them from you. But don't expect her to be interested in you as human beings. Nor as patients either. Good heavens!" Maisie lifted sharp eyebrows above sparkling, malicious eyes. "You don't seriously think, do you, that she's interested in her *work*?"

"But you said," protested Jean, revolted by so much duplicity, "that you loved her yourself. And yet you say such things——"

"I'm devoted to her," exclaimed Maisie, surprised. "I couldn't go on living without her."

"But you can't love her really," stammered Jean, to whom love was love, hate was hate, and ambivalence seemed a bit lower-class—like taking a tip, or looking round for 'perks'. But this small, emaciated female, with the loud voice and intolerable self-assurance, was from Winifred's own class. Impossible to snub, and impertinently inquisitive. Down at Croydon, Jean's friends kept their private business to themselves and respected each other's reticence. Jean knew where she stood, down at Croydon. But now she felt uneasy, for Maisie was the one Winifred preferred, and loyalty forced her to try and see in Maisie some superior quality which would explain to her her own failure. But Jean could only explain it in terms she understood. Namely, that she was not rich, or sophisticated, or smart. And that she had no 'presence'. And that neither she nor Carey spoke with the accent that Winifred and Maisie spoke with—the unmistakable accent of an expensive school.

"What you really want," said Maisie suddenly, "is a real, strong, supporting, sterling friendship. Have you any sisters? . . . I thought not. So you're trying to get from Winifred the sort of relationship that a sister would give you. You'll never get it."

"I have no family either," put in Lydia quietly, without

looking up. "My mother died when I was a child, and my father when I was sixteen."

Maisie's eyes sparkled with curiosity. It had taken her no time at all to sum up Jean, and to understand just how weary Winifred would feel when confronted with this scion of suburbia, but Lydia was another matter. Sophisticated and yet unworldly, proof of experience was implicit in her whole personality. She was more childlike than Jean, and at the same time more mature. There was something about her that Maisie could only describe as un-spinsterish. But she was no boarding-house *habituée*. Her manner was quite simple. She lacked the glittering and glassy social surface that allows communications with others to be smoothly and continuously made, without ever breaking through to the depths. Her personality suggested depth, and she did not try to conceal it. She was without pose, and this gave her an appearance of pathos, of defencelessness, perhaps because the majority of people live apathetically by habit, and Lydia had just the quality of interrogation that could question the value of habits. But she had failed to find the answer to her questioning, and this might account for her distracted air, hunched on the end of her bed, hugging her elbows, and following the movement of her swaying foot, but actually not there in the room with them at all. That much Maisie could understand about her: that she was remote from them, as no doubt she was remote from Winifred. Maisie was sure that Winifred would resent this remoteness. Winifred, who was so practical, and could on occasion be so hard, would detest a quality that eluded classification. She would be exasperated beyond patience by a condition that could not readily be diagnosed. Maisie was at once, and generously, sorry for Lydia, who would never get anything out of Harley Street, and who had no one and nothing to fall back on, unless, like Maisie herself, she could wrestle with Winifred and outlast her, and in the final issue wring from her the affection that Winifred so feared. But Lydia gave no promise of such pugnacity. A little, highly-strung creature she appeared to Maisie, and as such pitiful. Maisie could see no good coming to Lydia, and impetuously

she burst into speech—advice, admonition, assurances of sympathy, and promises of help competing with each other to snatch Lydia from what was certainly going to be the jaws of death.

“Then you think I should stop treatment, like Mrs. Martin?” Lydia asked her doubtfully.

“Of course you should,” exclaimed Maisie. “Why, what do you think you’ll get out of it if you go on? You’ve not got the stamina to fight Winifred like I have. Even me——well, look at me——Its taken all I’ve got, and I’ve been fighting her for years. And even *now* there are times when Winifred holds me at arm’s length as if there’d never been anything between us at all.”

“I can’t understand her,” commented Lydia, dry-eyed but trembling. “I’ve always thought that people who couldn’t love were a sort of devil.”

“But you’ve got me all wrong,” cried Maisie, her thin face working and her trained dancer’s body quivering with the urgency of Lydia’s danger. “I never said Winifred wasn’t capable of love. She *is* capable of it. She loves *me*. . . . What I said was this. She has no time for friendships unless she can get something out of them, and she’s crazy about power and prestige. You two poor things don’t know her background, and Heaven knows what you’ve imagined to yourselves. . . . Listen. Winifred’s the product of a country rectory and a safe, old-fashioned school. When they were children, they were taken for walks through the village with their nanny. It was for ever impressed on them that they must be discreet. If they met old Mrs. Smith, and she asked how Mrs. Jones was getting on, they were taught to shake their heads politely and say: ‘We don’t know.’ No matter if their father had just returned from the scene of Mrs. Jones’s suicide. Or abduction. Or what-have-you. . . . Always discretion, and the withdrawal from any friendly overtures by folks outside the family. It’s grown on Winifred for years. She couldn’t change now even if she wanted to. And she doesn’t want to. She thinks it’s being ‘professional’.”

“But a nurse in a hospital——?” began Lydia, looking full

at her visitor for the first time, for Maisie's oscillations between the obvious and the unlikely fascinated her. "Wouldn't they knock that out of her in hospital?"

Maisie smiled broadly, delighted to have captured at last Lydia's attention. "My dear girl, you've never met Dr. Treherne, have you?"

"No——"

"Well, there's your answer. Dr. Treherne's a dear. But she's a 'lady' in the real, old-fashioned sense. It was she who taught Winifred the job. And, mind you, Dr. Margaret Treherne's a real doctor. But she's not *your* generation or outlook. She's a Victorian. And I wouldn't mind betting——" Maisie flashed a sharp glance, not without malice, at the two faces on the bed: Lydia's, attentive and pale, Jean's, tear-stained and flushed—"that neither Dr. Treherne nor Winifred has had half the experience of life that either of you two've had. As for Winifred, unless you're a spinster at heart—like she is—she'll repudiate you. . . . Oh yes, she'll treat you, but she'll treat you at arm's length." Maisie flung out an arm, stabbing the air with her thumb. "She'll keep you *there*. You never had a chance——"

"But she's quite broad-minded," interposed Lydia, trying to be fair. "She told me the story of Goya and his mistress, for instance——"

"Mistresses!" exploded Maisie. "Of course she *talks* about them. That's her job. But confront her with one in real life, and she'd heave. She'd repudiate her from the bottom of her heart." Snorting with indignation, Maisie tore a cigarette from her case, and lit it with unsteady fingers. "You poor little thing, you're heading for trouble. And if you're not careful, you'll find there's no way back."

"It's true what Miss Lawrence says," put in Jean timidly. "I can see it in my own case. I ought to be happy with Carey and the children. But I think of Dr. Orwin all day and all night. That's not as it should be, is it?"

Lydia looked at her compassionately. "No. That's not as it should be." She felt a few hundred years older than Jean. But it was hopeless to try and explain. Jean would

come to it in time, but she would have to learn by the hard way. . . .

After Maisie had left her, and Jean had caught the bus to Victoria, Lydia straightened her bedroom. Jean's cake-crumbs and Maisie's cigarette-ash lay together at the bottom of the waste-paper basket. Lydia smoothed the quilt over her bed, and drew back the curtains, and carried off the crockery to the bathroom where there was hot water, and dried it, and came back to the oppression and hideousness of her bedroom. For the first time she tried to see it as it would appear to Winifred. Until now it had suited her very well. It was somewhere to sleep, somewhere to be alone. She never noticed the dints and scratches on the satin walnut bedroom suite, the faintly smelling washstand with its revolting slop-pail only half hidden by a curtain of flowered chintz. The beige and puce curtains at the window, the crimson and brown drugget on the floor, cynically ill-matched and only there because they were cheap, had not bothered her. Her room was very high up. Coming in from her office, she would often pause on the top flight of stairs, her hand on the balustrade, to breathe; and, stopping, listen to the muffled sounds of movement on lower floors, and the jangle of London noises from the square outside—children shouting as they bowled hoops round the gravel path, the scratch of wheels as a nursemaid pushed a black or maroon pram, the hooting of cars, the grind of a taxi pulling up to the kerb, the shrill punctuation of bicycle bells, the mournful call of birds in the high, bare branches of planes. She knew the shape that the tops of the plane trees made across the pale London sky. She knew the sky by heart, its melancholy moods, the sweep of soft clouds deepening to leaden grey and the colourless sky of winter. The life beyond the window touched her heart, but she remained blind to the squalid, obdurate masses that composed her room.

In all this record of failure, only one hope still shone for her. There was no reason why, she thought, halting by the wardrobe mirror, heavy-eyed, hands clasped against her mouth, she need go on making such tremendous efforts. Her work

was meaningless to her; she had neither lover nor friend. Dr. Orwin, whom she loved too well, could hardly endure to be alone with her for the scraped forty minutes of her session. But her script—her *Spring and Fall*—had still not yet been finally rejected. While it remained with the B.B.C., Lydia felt she could still take hope for the future. She could imagine herself pulling out a letter of acceptance from her handbag and explaining to the astonished Winifred what *Spring and Fall* was all about. They would face each other across the consulting-room, smiling, voluble, friendly. Winifred would not need to disapprove of her any more. Perhaps it had not been very kind on her part to keep the writing of the script a secret? Lydia stared at herself in the mirror, wondering just why she had never been able to talk to Winifred of her ambitions. Right from the start there had been something forbidding in Winifred's expression whenever she touched on the subject of music. Certainly Winifred did not believe she could ever have made good. But then—Lydia sat down abruptly on the bed, shocked by the revelation of her own stupidity—she had never given Winifred any tangible reason to believe in her. Whose fault was that? Certainly not Winifred's.

The face in the mirror, tense and brooding, jerked up to meet her own. A pulse over her left eye started to throb, and pain, shooting along the nerves, under her skull, left her dizzy and sick with excitement. She pressed her palm against the eyeball, and waited while fiery worms slithered across the darkness that was pricked by a thousand tremulous threads of coloured light. 'I shall have a terrible headache if I don't calm down,' Lydia thought, and rose from the bed, and felt round the back of the washstand for her aspirin bottle, and tipped out three tablets. She could never swallow pills easily, and her mouth felt dry. She laid them down in a neat row and poured herself a tumbler of water. She pulled down the blind, and waited for the waves of pain to recede.

The fault was all her own. Her head still ached dully, but she could see quite clearly what she ought to do. There was a carbon copy of *Spring and Fall* in her suitcase, and copies of

the synopsis and the music manuscript, as well as several pages of notes and stage directions. Whatever its merit, it represented a complete job of work. But how was Winifred to know this unless Lydia showed her? Obviously she must take the manuscript, suitcase and all, along with her to Harley Street to-morrow, and after they had run through the dreams she would tell Winifred what she had attempted, and they would discuss *Spring and Fall* together. How childish she had proved herself to make such a mystery about something that was really quite simple. . . .

Yet she remained uneasy. Some question remained unanswered. Some solution evaded her. When she awoke between one and two the next morning she remembered Jean, and it came to her then that Jean, who looked so matronly and was so eager to appreciate the arts for which she had no aptitude, was more vulnerable than herself; that, in spite of her established wifeness and motherhood, Jean was younger and more ignorant, less wary and less likely, if, as seemed possible, Winifred abandoned her case, to find a *modus vivendi* than Lydia herself. Lydia thought about Jean for a long time. Sleep steadily retreated, and refused to return. Finally, Lydia got up and fetched her suitcase from the wardrobe. Shivering a little in her thin pyjamas, she perched herself on the *pouffe*, and using the suitcase for a desk wrote Jean a letter. She sealed the envelope, propped it on the mantelpiece, and returned to bed. But she was not satisfied. At last she unlocked the suitcase again, searched among her papers, and found what she was looking for. It was the manuscript of a poem in four stanzas. She read it through several times slowly, then clipped it to the back of her letter. She added a postscript, re-sealed the letter and got into bed.

She slept lightly, woke again at five, and at last dropped into a heavy sleep between six and seven. When her alarm went off at half-past seven, she struggled out of a nightmare. She was dreaming of a prison in which someone told her she would be incarcerated for life; that Desmond would never come back. She wandered through many dark passages but none of them led to the gate. The prisoners smiled at her but

no one spoke. She longed to be free. Suddenly a window opened on to a garden, and she saw masses of spring flowers—hyacinths, narcissi and daffodils—blowing in the sunlight among the fresh spring leaves. She exclaimed: "I've found the Golden Grove!" One of the prisoners was a woman, dying alone in a dark and miserable cell. She wanted to take this woman some of the flowers to cure her of her deadly sickness. But she had no key to unlock the prison gate. Then Winifred, dressed as the prison nurse, appeared in the cell, dangling the key, but refused to give it up or leave it in the door. As Lydia turned helplessly away, Winifred's face floated up close to her own and expanded till it filled the room. The mouth yawned like a cavern, rows of teeth appeared, and a screeching voice tore through the defence of sleep: "*What you need is RED PEP-PER!*" Lydia flung over on her side, opened her eyes, and saw the bell of the alarm-clock vibrating. There was a blurred white rectangle on the mantelpiece, but she was too short-sighted to recognise it for her letter to Jean. She put a hand under her pillow, found the aspirin bottle and shook a couple of tablets into the palm of her hand. Then she remembered her visitors of the previous afternoon. She had sat up late writing a letter to Jean. It was Monday morning, and she would be seeing Dr. Orwin in Harley Street within a very few hours.

XXVII

THAT SAME Sunday afternoon which brought the two unexpected visitors to Lydia's boarding-house saw Dr. Treherne taking tea as usual in Winifred's lounge in Hampstead.

Dr. Treherne's retirement was now complete. Her flat at the hospital was made over for additional staff bedrooms, and her maid down in Surrey was absorbed in arrangements for the new house, so that her mistress should enjoy the dignified

privacy that was due to her age and reputation. The old habit of visiting Winifred on Sundays had, however, survived the upheaval. Dr. Treherne took her lunch early, and arrived in Hampstead at much the same time for tea as when she had only to cross London from Walthamstow. Since her retirement she had come to rely more and more on Winifred's company as her last link with the world of work which had engrossed all her income and her talents for sixty years. Her memory was not so good now as it once was. She admitted that she often found it difficult to concentrate and that this made it impossible to deal with patients. But she did not enjoy her enforced leisure. The weekly visits enabled her to feel that she was not completely out of touch. If she was becoming more of a listener and less of a talker nowadays in Winifred's company, it was because her workless hours depressed her. The medical 'shop', which Winifred's preoccupations were certain to produce, in turn elated and discouraged her. Sometimes, but not for long, she wondered if she had done right to leave the hospital before her deafness made it absolutely necessary. She continued to worry about the shortage of trained medical staff.

Her discouragement was not lost on Winifred, who, however, on this Sunday afternoon, had troubles enough of her own without wasting sympathy on a state of affairs that was not her fault. Stirring her tea, which was heavily sugared, Winifred remarked: "Phoebe's wedding's in June."

"In June?" repeated Dr. Treherne, interested. She had met Phoebe several times during the growing-up process, and thought her an attractive child. But the younger generation, she considered, charming and affectionate as they so often were, lacked purpose. Phoebe, in Dr. Treherne's opinion, would never be the woman her aunt was.

"I'm wondering if I'll still be here for it."

Dr. Treherne set her cup carefully down in the exact centre of the strawberry-patterned saucer. Since their discussion of Winifred's health back in the autumn, they had rather avoided the topic of Winifred's holiday. It was understood that Winifred needed a rest, and that the transition from private to public practice would be a good occasion for a break. But

while the Regional Board appointments remained in the air it was no time for Winifred to be out of London. Of Winifred's reluctance to meet Clifford Forrester under the conditions of artificial gaiety imposed by a wedding, Dr. Treherne knew nothing. She rather liked weddings herself. The tie, unbroken by death, that still linked her with her brother Edwin, who had not lived long enough to marry, made other ties—of propinquity or old resentments—unreal to her. These only were real: Winifred's lovely home, and the Harley Street consulting-room where her own work would achieve permanence.

"I should miss coming here on Sundays," she sighed, leaning back in the arm-chair, her broad, brown hands spread out along the damasked silk of the arms. Winifred's bare walls, with the austere and slender furniture spaced along them, the green glow of the carpet, the gleaming, greeny-blue tiles, books in shadowed recesses, and the modern note struck by a few magazines and the cocktail cabinet were all precious to her. Now that she no longer had her flat at the hospital, Winifred's house was her last remaining *pied-à-terre* in London. She liked Surrey, but not so well now that she was forced to live there entirely.

"We could resume the habit when I return."

"But I don't think," said Dr. Treherne, sitting up in some alarm, "that you should think of leaving England just now. Things are so critical——"

"Yet if I wait too long," Winifred reminded her, "I may lose the opportunity altogether."

Indeed, Winifred wondered how much longer she *dared* to wait. Already the strain, which once made itself obvious only in moments of uncontrollable anger, was beginning to invade the greater part of her conscious life. Scarcely felt as tension, the psychologist in her could not but acknowledge how frequently and monotonously the bones of her skull felt stretched and tender as if pain were waiting to leap out in an instant off guard. Holding herself erect as she preceded patients upstairs from the waiting-room in Harley Street, she would pass a hand lightly up the iron balustrade, and wonder what they would say if she collapsed entirely. When her shoulder-

blades and her pelvis ached, she held herself rigid on her doctor's chair, and drew her head back, exultant in the difference between herself and the patient recumbent on the couch. So might the cedar tree or mahogany observe its own resilience and toughness, and despise the creepers that everywhere search and cling for some strength not their own. But it would be foolish to ignore in herself any symptoms of weakness or the possibility of a breakdown.

"About that, my dear," said Dr. Treherne gently, and wiped her mouth on the napkin, "you know best. I can only point out that it might be unfortunate for you to be out of England. As things are."

"Yes, I see that too, of course."

Tea seemed to be finished. Winifred shook the silver bell beside her on the tea wagon, and Miss Begg appeared from the kitchen. Miss Begg collected the crockery and emptied the ash-trays. Lighting a cigarette from her lighter, Winifred looked at Dr. Treherne askance, one eyebrow raised. "Phoebe doesn't smoke," she smiled.

A little anxiously, Dr. Treherne asked: "June, you said?"

April sunlight, sparkling on the wet leaves at the bottom of the garden, moves the heart with memories of summers that, like youth, have wasted. Winifred said remotely: "No doubt, it will be a considerable occasion. Dorothy has set her heart on a big wedding."

"Of course," Dr. Treherne reminded her, "you cannot upset your plans to fit in with Phoebe. Much as you would like to."

"No." Winifred watched with equanimity the smoke curling off the end of her cigarette. A little ash fell unregarded into the fur of the hearthrug. Winifred let it lie where it fell; Miss Begg was paid to follow her around with a dustpan, but, even without Miss Begg, Winifred never allowed herself to be caught up by trivialities. One achieved success by shaking off the irrelevances of life. Other women, patients for example, seemed unable to grasp this simple truth.

Yet it was true, Winifred thought, that she herself was utterly exhausted, and that exhaustion was dangerous. Working always so hard, so driven by her sense of duty to the

community, Winifred felt that success had taken over the control of her life. She was no longer the mistress of her own actions. Before everything went smash she must somehow regain control. She must extricate herself from her multifarious engagements and relax as other women did. She wanted to be able to lie in bed in the mornings if she felt like it. She wanted to escape from rationing, and buy herself some new clothes, and eat unlimited, exotic food. She wanted to talk to interesting people (not patients), and look at skies and seas under the vivid sunlight of the Pacific coast. Three months. . . . One could hardly fall out of the running in three months. . . . Three months should be enough.

"I'm a little worried," confessed Dr. Treherne, staring sadly at the green carpet, "about Dewey's latest success." Raising her candid eyes to Winifred's thin face, she fancied she could see reflected there her own apprehension. "I saw my cousin at the Ministry again last week, and he was quite tiresome about the Regional Board appointments. I spoke to him very straightly, and told him how important it was that there should be a good proportion of women serving on the Board. The trouble is, we still live under a patriarchal system. Legal, economic and social. Men are so *stupid*," she frowned. "They pay lip service to the equality of the sexes in medicine. But when it comes down to brass tacks, they nominate Dewey, and leave you out. I've no patience with them." She glared at Winifred as if Winifred too subscribed to an outdated masculine code.

Winifred tried to smile. "I've read *Self-Transcendence*, as a matter of fact." Throwing her cigarette, half-smoked, behind the electric fire, she added casually: "I thought the chapter on Child Guidance was quite good." She was conscious that her smile had become a little bleak and turned it off instantly. "I shall wait a little longer before I decide the date of my holiday. Antony can have me at any time, and my sister-in-law seems easy either way. There is one snag, of course. In order to get a passage, I have to be there for the start of the lecture course—so I must leave here not later than the middle of July. But I could go any time in May."

Dr. Treherne shaded her eyes with her hand. "Yes. I see." The summer ahead of them was to be a crisis summer, then. It would be her last opportunity to serve the community in the only way left open to her. For, in spite of her retirement, the work went on. The need was as great—greater than ever. It was the consciousness of the need that made her empty timetable so hard to bear—the idle hours so bitter. Sitting by her pleasant window in Surrey, idle-handed, she would pass in review the many patients who had fought their way back to health under her treatment, and regret the thousands to whom as yet no treatment could be made available. There were always too few of us, she would murmur, while the old sorrow took hold of her again: that so much remained to be done, and so few could be induced to do it. A text she had learnt during childhood would float into her mind. A picture of harvest fields under the autumn sunlight. . . . *Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest.* But the reapers were missing in this vision of plenitude. *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest* (was it in Bible class that she had been given a text, illuminated perhaps with an ear of wheat across one corner?) *that He shall send forth labourers into His harvest.* That was what they had always needed. Ever since she could remember she had been haunted by the pain and poverty of most of the world. One pair of hands could do something to alleviate its horror. And indeed, so long as one was kept working at full stretch, one could forget how very much more still remained unattempted. But now she was no longer working. It was impossible to narcotise the anxiety by incessant activity. She remembered how one could scarcely walk the length of a London street without being confronted by symptom after symptom of ill-health. Fear and apprehension, dullness and resentment, defiance and stony resignation—if one were trained, as she was trained, to look for these things, one saw little else in the faces that hurried by, a never-ending procession. If for once one met a glance that was radiant with confidence, buoyant with happiness, one looked again and remembered. For such faces were the exception. Yet, if psychiatry had its way, happiness should be

available for all. If only more psychiatrists could be trained, there would be fewer mishandled children, and fewer unstable parents. In the course of a few generations neurosis could be controlled as the killing diseases of the past were controlled. But this was still a blue-print for the future, and meanwhile the sum of human misery fretted and appalled her. *For the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.*

"It's not easy," she said at last, disturbed by some clash of emphasis between the cool room, with its few slender pieces hardly breaking the creamy surface of walls or the glowing green carpet, and Winifred's dissatisfied expression—mouth pinched, and eyelids heavy over contracted pupils and irises that were colourless as clouded water. For all her composure, Winifred looked brittle; almost one could feel the currents of will-power that streamed along her muscles, holding her spine erect and forbidding the lines between her nostrils and the corners of her lips to fall. "It's very difficult," said Dr. Treherne, "to submit to living vicariously. I still feel so full of energy. That's the trouble——"

"We still bring you our problems."

"No! I've got to face the truth, Winifred." Dr. Treherne gripped the chair, and her voice, in its sincerity, became almost staccato. "I've watched you mature for the last thirty years. And I've a poor opinion of my own workmanship if I can't trust you to take over. That is," she added ruefully, "if they don't ditch my plans by pushing in Dewey over your head."

"I noticed he had very good reviews."

"Oh, don't talk to me about reviews," said Dr. Treherne, quite out of patience. "What vexes me more than anything is, the man doesn't really *want* them. Oh, he wants his book to be read, of course. But he quite simply doesn't set much store by notoriety. And then again——" she frowned, but her fundamental goodwill changed the frown into an unwilling smile—"he's not quite notorious enough. He's just at that dangerous point where he could do you a whole lot of harm."

"Would you," asked Winifred, shading her face with her hand, and speaking with her usual pleasant lack of emphasis,

"call Dewey notorious? I thought the medical journals were rather flattering."

"So they were," said Dr. Treherne promptly. "But they were controversial. And that makes people wonder. Straight praise I wouldn't mind. Most people who read a favourable review of a book forget it. But *Self-Transcendence* runs slap in the face of conservative practice. And it's not quite unorthodox enough to be disregarded. All the different schools of psychiatric theory can agree with some of it. And disagree with the rest. And that sets everyone by the ears. It's vexatious beyond words that Dewey should have to get himself into the papers just now. At this crisis of your career. What's your real opinion of him, Winifred?"

Winifred temporised, fumbling with the catch of her cigarette-case and flipping at her lighter with a vicious little jerk of the thumb. "I think he sometimes talks to get a reaction from us. Personally I don't think views like his would get by with the authorities. They're intended to be provocative."

"And yet——" Dr. Treherne could not but be fair. "He gets such good results. One sends him patients that are pretty nearly hopeless. And after a year or two you'd never know, casually meeting them, they'd been ill."

"He certainly handles people well," admitted Winifred, who was beginning to feel she could not bear much more of the exemplary Dewey. "But isn't there," she suggested cautiously, "more to this appointment than just a knack of managing patients?"

Dr. Treherne relaxed back into the chair and covered her eyes with her hand. "Of course there is, Winifred. Yes, I'd forgotten all that. There's the whole administrative side of it." For she could not forget that to women like herself and Winifred, wholly dedicated to the work, therapy was more than a vocation. It was the only activity through which their instinctive and intellectual life could entirely and satisfyingly function. Women—as she had once reminded Winifred—care for life, while men—and all historical evidence gave proof of this—were as ready to destroy it as to defend it. She reflected, while Winifred sat watching her, hardly breathing, yet elated

and somehow confident of the result. "Yes," said Dr. Treherne at last. "There's the administrative side of it. And Dewey doesn't like committee work. And you're so good at it, as well as so clever as a clinician."

"I wouldn't say that," murmured Winifred.

There was silence for a few minutes. Then Dr. Treherne looked up, radiantly smiling. "I want you to come to lunch on Sunday week, Winifred. My cousin from the M.O.H. will be there, and we'll have a chance to talk things over. . . ."

XXVIII

"AND I can see nothing ahead of me this summer," declared Maisie from the same arm-chair a few hours later, "except the 'plunge into the pit'. With you in Australia, I shall be entirely alone." She looked round her despairingly, seeing the lamplit room as a vignette, warm and shining, against the icy nothingness of space and the dreariness of time. She stared unbelievably at the placid figure of Winifred, sitting with folded hands, reflective below the lamp.

A little wearily, Winifred said: "But we've been into all this before, Maisie."

"Oh, I know." Lighting one cigarette from another, and smoking too fast, Maisie admitted: "You've been very good to me, Winifred. And I do appreciate it. You've found me Dr. Allington to carry on my case while you're away. And he's nice—— But it's not a doctor I want. I want *you*. It's *you* I love." Surely, she wanted to add, there must be something wrong with you, or you could not refuse this overwhelming gift that can solve every problem and compensate for every anguish. Love, she wanted to say, can cure *all*. But she could not say it with Winifred sitting there, pliant, cool and derisive; devaluating, as Maisie knew, the emotional excitements.

The April evening, chilled by Atlantic winds that pierced the

cracks round the french windows, darkened the shadow that fell across the house from the tossing elms at the end of the garden. Winifred, who never felt the cold but who disliked electricity bills, got up and pulled the curtains together with a single jerk of the wrist. The room contracted. Their two chairs, only a few feet apart across the silvered rug, lay half in the hoop of light shed by the lamp. The creamy damask presented a surface like the swelling of fruit. Light, quenched in the folds of Winifred's dress, pin-pointed the amber necklace and bracelet that Maisie wore; her nose and chin sharpened, her lips receded. Lines sprang into view at the corners of her mouth and between her brows. Her eyes were enormous. Winifred, just touched by compunction, controlled her impatience.

"I did wrong at the start when I allowed you to love me so much," she said reluctantly. "But then——" she shrugged her shoulders. "I think if I hadn't let you love me, you would have committed suicide when Clare left you." It was her first admission that she herself had knowingly taken over, in Maisie's affections, the rôle of Clare.

"Oh no, I don't think so," said Maisie instantly. "If you'd let me alone, I'd have got over it somehow. Eventually I'd have wanted to go on living." She felt obscurely, but could not bring herself to admit even to herself, that the cure was worse than the disease.

"Well, at any rate, the new dramatic school will keep you very busy while I'm away. I just can't tell you how delighted I am that all that affair is settled."

For Maisie was at long last to achieve independence. It was lucky that her family were rich. Without money—how often had Winifred ran up against this inexorable pre-condition of civilised living—every avenue for therapy was hopelessly blocked. You came back and back to the one thing that mattered—£ s. d. Or, as she preferred to call it, delicately approaching the subject with her patients, the economic factor. Caterina's husband had come forward with the capital for Maisie to begin her career all over again.

"That makes things worse," retorted Maisie. "Here am I,

getting on for retiring age, and starting afresh with all this work and responsibility. I'd never have taken it on if I'd known you were going to leave me in the lurch."

Winifred ignored this. Planning for Maisie's welfare during her holiday was all very well, but she had no intention of enduring an emotional scene to-night. Dr. Treherne's visit had been altogether too much of a strain. When people grow old, she thought, they should withdraw completely, and not hamper those who still have to carry the burden. Dr. Treherne had done a fine job of work, and no one could be more appreciative or more grateful than Winifred. Still, she had expressed her gratitude often enough: her whole life was a response to Dr. Treherne's generous ambitions and practical foresight. But now the older woman had retired. They were running Walthamstow well enough without her. It is a tragic fact that senility can transform generosity into sentimentality and vigour into fussing. Winifred felt it very hard that Dr. Treherne should continue her Sunday visits as of right, and prevent her from spending her week-ends with younger people who were more in touch. Dr. Treherne, who had instructed her in ambition, should know better.

Specifically, she was infuriated by Dr. Treherne's inability to secure the Regional Board appointment in her favour. She suspected too that Dr. Treherne admired Dewey's book more than she cared to say. It *was* a good book; of that there could be no doubt. But it hardly entitled its author to such absurd consideration. Winifred was chairman or member of no less than eighteen committees. Dewey, as far as one could judge, figured on not more than six. Did people imagine that all this committee work was *fun*?

Winifred said at last: "Dr. Allington will take care of you. He's quite clever, I believe. And three months will pass very quickly."

"Three months is eternity." Maisie, disconsolate, wondered if she would be in a mental home before Winifred returned. That, or she would commit suicide. Now, when the need for Winifred's physical presence overwhelmed her, she could use the telephone; every week she had her session in Harley Street;

she was invited, on rare occasions such as this, to Winifred's house; and at least once a week she drove round in Winifred's car to visit patients, or they picnicked in the country. But Dr. Allington was a stranger. She would feel more at home in Lydia's comic little bed-sitting-room than talking to him. Perhaps she ought to let Winifred know that she was still seeing Lydia. She knew that Winifred would disapprove, but it was better that way than for Winifred to hear of it from Lydia.

To gain time, she opened her handbag and rummaged for cigarettes. She always brought with her a new packet of Turkish, and contrived to leave it behind for Winifred to finish. She brought chocolates too, and always chocolate biscuits to the consulting-room for Winifred's tea. Winifred had half-heartedly protested at the beginning and told Maisie to use her sweet ration for herself: boiled sweets contained glucose, and Maisie needed all the energy she could get. But Maisie overruled her. Nowadays Winifred's thanks were perfunctory or omitted altogether, but she would have been both vexed and surprised if Maisie had come empty-handed. Standing in front of the hearth to reach the silver cigarette-box on the narrow mantelpiece, Maisie said cautiously: "I saw that little Bentley woman again this afternoon," and carefully did not look at Winifred while she smoothed the cigarettes into the box. The crystal clock ticked on gently through the momentary silence that followed.

Pale but unconcerned, Winifred raised her head. "Aren't you being a little unwise?" she enquired mildly.

"No. I don't really think so," exclaimed Maisie, relieved, and sat down again facing Winifred. "No. Here you are, have one of mine." She lit a cigarette between her own lips and passed it to Winifred, who accepted it after only a slight pause. Lighting another for herself, Maisie observed: "She's an attractive little creature, Miss Bentley. But what have you done to make her dislike you so?"

"Dislike me? Does she really?"

"Yes. At least, she pretends to. But *I* think," said Maisie, who had enjoyed her gate-crash of Lydia's tea-party, "that she

loves you very much at heart. I'm quite sure you've been terribly unkind to her, Winifred darling. And the poor little thing has to whistle to keep her courage up."

"Love and hate," said Winifred calmly, "are never far apart."

"I meant," cried Maisie, penitent, "to tell her you objected to our friendship. But it was so difficult to wipe all the happiness out of her face. She always seems so grateful to be noticed."

"I should hardly think your visits would make all that difference to her."

"You'd be surprised," retorted Maisie. "But then we talk about you. At least, I do whenever I see her. Which isn't often. Weeks go by and I don't even give her a thought. But to-day I must admit I felt a little anxious about her. But there——" Maisie shrugged. "She's not my business."

And indeed she called on Lydia very seldom. It was only when Winifred had no time for her that Maisie turned to Lydia as a substitute. Winifred must know very well that only here in this quiet room could Maisie achieve that marriage of contentment with ecstasy that gives meaning to life. Winifred's room, when Maisie was not present, existed as an enchantment which one might hope to recapture. She knew by heart its pale and glossy walls, the exact number of glasses and bottles in the cocktail cabinet, and the soft pressure of the green carpet as one stepped on to it from the parquet. It was she who had given Winifred the pale jar and the branches of white lilac that breathed of spring from the corner by the fireplace. Flowers she could always bring: lily of the valley to plant in the garden, and window-boxes of early jonquils, and late roses to tide Winifred over until the snowdrops arrived. Loving her so much, it was only natural that she should want to talk to Lydia when Winifred was not available. And Lydia was always glad to see her.

"She's a sweet little thing really," reflected Maisie aloud. Secure in her invitation to coffee at Winifred's house, she could afford to be sorry for both Jean and Lydia, who were obviously as devoted as she was, but for whom Winifred, as obviously, did not much care.

Winifred raised her eyebrows. "I think you will find, when you know her better, that she talks to impress." She paused, as if unwilling to release a professional secret, then, because Maisie was somebody very special, allowed herself to be charmingly indiscreet. "People of her sort talk a lot. It is so easy to let oneself be taken in by them. Miss Bentley sees herself as a thwarted artist, and would wish you to treat her as such." Winifred laughed indulgently. "I think you'll find that her 'art' ends where it begins—in a pious wish. But don't let her feed on your vitality, Maisie. She will, if she can."

"But do you mean that I shouldn't believe what she says?" asked Maisie, incredulous. For Lydia said so little. It was Maisie who did all the talking, at ease in Lydia's arm-chair, with the furniture squeezed in round them, and the wall-paper a-glare with roses, and the glimpse through the attic window of deprived and unlovely trees.

Nibbling a chocolate, Winifred shook her head. "You don't know what she's suffering from."

"No, I don't," Maisie admitted.

Winifred lifted the carton of chocolates on to her knee. Pleats of crimson and gilt tinfoil took fire from the honey-shaded lamp at the back of her chair. She moved one finger delicately among the chocolates, feeling for the soft centres. "You do make me behave like a pig, Maisie. You know I can't resist these delicious things." She pushed the hard centres all together into one corner. They could appear at her next luncheon-party in a silver sweet-dish. Young people were not bothered by dental plates that boggled at toffee.

"I love to see you enjoying them. Are those ones toffee?"

"It's quite all right," Winifred assured her. "I shall eat them later when I want something to suck."

"You are a darling," cried Maisie, relaxing, and not unconscious that her skirt had slipped to the side, showing an inch of nylon knicker.

"You utterly spoil me. That's the truth."

"But about Miss Bentley——" ventured Maisie, who could not forget Lydia's averted cheek and downcast eyes when they had talked of Winifred. "She does seem to appreciate one's

taking a little notice of her. She's such a lonely little creature. I feel I oughtn't to quite let her drop."

Winifred shook her head. "She's not really capable of giving affection."

"Not capable of giving affection!" Arrow-straight on the edge of the billowing arm-chair, Maisie searched Winifred's face incredulously. Either Winifred was lying, or she grievously lacked insight. It was true that Lydia could appear uncivil. Maisie herself had been taken in by the apparent chilliness of her welcome. Yet when Lydia lifted her eyes, it needed no great imagination to see to the bitterness and desolation that dictated her silence. Maisie tried to imagine Lydia here, curled up on the hearthrug at Winifred's feet, nibbling chocolates and flushed with happiness; Lydia being natural for half an hour. But it would never happen, and she knew better than to suggest it. There were some things that Winifred would never understand.

"I do think, though," said Maisie, wondering if she were going too far, "that she does need a little care——"

"As to that," said Winifred coldly, as she got up, scattering crumbs of chocolate and scraps of tinfoil, "you must allow me to judge. You are talking of something of which you know nothing whatever."

"That's true," agreed Maisie quickly. "And I don't want to know. After all, she's not my affair really——"

"No," said Winifred smoothly. "She's not your affair. You and Miss Bentley have absolutely nothing in common. . . ."

Yet Maisie's attachment to Lydia, which began innocently enough with a few words exchanged in a waiting-room, and ended with a casual visit on a Sunday afternoon when Maisie had an hour or so to kill, was destined profoundly to influence all their lives, and for Lydia at least was the prelude to tragedy.

On the Monday morning following Maisie's visit, Lydia presented herself at Harley Street as usual. Her session, timed for noon, began nearly half an hour late as usual, but she was accustomed to this. She had written out her dreams; she had decided to tell Winifred about the *Spring and Fall*; and she had

made up her mind at all costs to talk to Winifred more freely. Maisie was a talker, and Maisie got invitations to Hampstead. Perhaps what was wrong with herself was simply her reticence. She felt stupid and dumb on Winifred's couch, and no doubt looked as stupid as she felt. From now on she would make a fresh beginning.

"My dreams seem to run in a rut," she remarked, as she climbed on the couch, and covered her small body with Winifred's rug. Nervously smiling, her eyes remained anxious. Round the consulting-room, alight with daffodils, flowed a current of cool air from the widely opened windows. Jars of lilac and almond blossom stood in the hearth. Lydia shivered, and pulled the sleeves of her woollen blouse down over her wrists. Winifred, flawless in a new tweed, looked at the dreams, glanced at her wrist-watch, and settled to read.

Lydia took a deep breath. "The dreams are all about you," she began bravely.

"So it appears." Glancing up, for Lydia was lying on her side, rubbing her cheek against the cushion, Winifred remarked: "Flat on your back, please, Miss Bentley. No, not like that. Put your legs down straight. That's better." How Lydia lay was really a matter of complete indifference, but Winifred still felt irritated by Maisie's intervention of the previous evening. For five years now, Maisie had done as she was told. Winifred took her docility for granted. But now she was asserting her right to feel an affection not wholly centred on Winifred. 'I can't entirely let her drop,' Maisie had pleaded. 'I meant to tell her that you objected to our friendship but it was so difficult to wipe all the happiness from her face. She always seems so grateful to be noticed.' That this cheap little typist could ever become a serious rival to Winifred was, of course, quite ridiculous. But Winifred could not forget how Maisie had wasted precious minutes of her time discussing this chit, and how, even at the end, she had not promised not to see Lydia again.

The dreams covered several sheets of Lydia's clear and meticulous handwriting. Through them all, Winifred noticed, one figure emerged. Not a very attractive or goddess-like

figure, she concluded, and her mouth set in a line. Winifred expected her patients to dream about her, and often said she did not in the least mind if they cast her for the rôle of villain. But she much preferred to appear as a ministering angel, and Lydia plainly saw her as less than angelic. The dreams were an insult.

"Who is the child who accompanies you in most of these dreams?" she asked, after she had read them through twice.

Lydia shook her head. "No one I know. I don't know any children, as a matter of fact. Perhaps it's the child I wanted to have and never did have——" This seemed unlikely, however, for Lydia did not regard herself as a maternal type. "But I'm sure the hostess in the dream is yourself."

" 'I was travelling by train through open country' " (quoted Winifred slowly). " 'Then I saw the train go on alone and I was walking down the track, carrying a child in my arms. It was very tired and strained, and felt so heavy that I could hardly go on. Then I was in a wood in a valley, and there was a clearing among the trees. You laid a meal in the clearing, and I sat down in the grass with the child. There was nothing to eat but a bowl of hash. I forced myself to eat it out of politeness. I remarked that hash was an unsuitable food to give a child. . . . ' "

Winifred looked up to ask: "What do you connect hash with? Have you any recollections of being forced to eat it at any time? Don't you like it?"

Not meeting Winifred's eye, Lydia said uncomfortably: "I don't like any of those made-up dishes. They're not real food, are they?" There was a long pause.

"But you ate it——?" prompted Winifred.

"Out of politeness. Yes."

"H'm. Well." Winifred scribbled a note on the back of the sheet: 'A food not liked,' and went on reading about the child.

" ' . . . hash was an unsuitable food to give a child, but I made the child take a helping. It turned away and finally

was sick. By that time the wood was full of people and they joined us at the meal. There wasn't enough food to go round. You didn't notice us, so at last I picked the child up and carried it away. I could see nothing but a great plain round us to the horizon.' ”

With the dream still vivid in her imagination, Lydia shuddered. The landscape of the dream, like Winifred's consulting-room, had lain wide open to travelling winds, and there was no spot where she could sink down with her burden of the child and feel warm and secure. They were both so hungry, but the sight of the blobs of hash made her stomach heave. She had controlled herself and behaved as a civilised adult should behave, but she could not help it if the child, less tolerant of improper food, had rejected it with a vomit. And the 'hostess' of the meal was not interested in either of them. Numbers she liked to have, but the individual guests were beneath her notice. She had not noticed them go away.

“The sun was shining in the dream,” explained Lydia. “The railway ran through a wide, flat plain, and somewhere far to the south lay the sea.” So far, indeed, that the railway had stretched into infinity. If there had been trains, one could have got the child safely home, for the sea was both infinity and a home that would offer them security. “I should have liked to take the train home,” Lydia went on slowly, “but all the horizons were empty. Nothing moved. So I picked the child up in my arms and started to walk. I woke up at last. I knew I should never reach my destination.”

“Well,” said Winifred briskly, “those kind of dreams are quite ordinary after all. We all suffer from frustration in some form or another. Probably the child is some aspect of yourself.” She decided the dream was not worth further discussion. On the face of it, one would have diagnosed anxiety, but she had long ago labelled Lydia as a hysteric. If other symptoms arose, throwing doubt on the original diagnosis, and she kept chasing off after them in various directions, she would never get through the day's work at all. Once a hysteric, always a hysteric. The numbness of Lydia's hands

was quite conclusive. She put the dream down and picked up the next sheet.

"In this dream you bring the child to see me at the consulting-room, and leave behind a suitcase of letters and papers. You can interpret it as I read it." She crossed her legs and began.

" 'I waited all day in the room downstairs to see you. The child was with me. She had left a suitcase in your consulting-room and wanted to get it back. But your appointments were blocked solid. . . . ' "

Under Winifred's enquiring gaze Lydia flushed. The unpunctuality of her sessions was a torment to her, for, however willing she might be to talk as she entered Harley Street, her confidence always evaporated in the half-hour or so of her time which was overrun by the previous patient. She fancied sometimes that Winifred enjoyed keeping her waiting. In small and gross ways she was made to acknowledge Winifred's power. Feeling unequal to comment, Lydia merely said: "The next part is more important, I think."

With a faint shrug, Winifred bent her head. "We have time to finish this, and perhaps one more. The rest we will do next time.

" 'I said to someone: "Will I never get in? I've been waiting all day." She said: "The princess is with her now. She's very rich and important." I said: "She must be a very stupid woman. More money than sense." I saw the princess go upstairs. She had a profile like a hawk. Her hair was black and hopelessly tangled up. I picked up the child and started off for home, but no trains were running. The child was crying. I held her closely in my arms and tried to rock her to sleep.' "

"Princess?" repeated Winifred, bewildered. There were no princesses among her patients, but Lady Hollerton might conceivably have cut ice: Monday morning was a favourite time with her, and no doubt she meandered on to the other

patients in the waiting-room as tirelessly as she kept going when she reached the couch.

Lydia moved restlessly beneath the rug. "I don't think it means a real princess. Just someone who matters a great deal——"

"I see." Acquitting Lydia of snobbery, Winifred remained unconvinced. The princess was evidently a very important person. There was the mention of the hawk's profile. Could she be Maisie? But Winifred could hardly see Maisie in the role of V.I.P.

"The last dream in the batch," said Lydia, abandoning the princess, of whom she was ashamed to admit jealousy, "is the most important one. It's about a Golden Grove, and there was something rather special I wanted to tell you about afterwards. I dreamt about it last night, and that was rather fortunate. You see, I have a confession to make."

Winifred flipped over several sheets with relief. "This one about a prison?" she asked pleasantly. It appeared to be quite short, so with luck she would get rid of Lydia in a few minutes. Lydia was the last private patient for the day. After lunch there would be the clinic at Walthamstow, where one could run through the patients at ten-minute intervals if necessary. And in the evening she had an important dinner engagement. A famous psychiatrist, with a fashionable practice drawn from Bloomsbury and Mayfair, had invited her to meet his wife and a few very exclusive, very important people, in his house overlooking Regent's Park. The price of her new frock—orchid-green, designed for her by a house that dressed Royalty—had made even Winifred blench. But clothes were her one extravagance.

"Would you like to read it through?" asked Lydia hopefully.

Winifred smiled. "All right. Then you can tell me what it was you wanted to say." She skimmed a few lines, then glanced around the consulting-room in surprise. If one could believe that dreams could foretell the future, then this one could be cited as a very good example.

"The Grove in the dream was full of flowers," said Lydia,

following the glance, for the consulting-room, like her dream, breathed the fragrance of spring. Almond blossom and white lilac filled the cold hearth, and in tiny, sparkling bowls along the mantelpiece wood anemones lifted frail petals stained with amethyst, and primroses floated on fat and yellowish leaves. On mantelpiece and bureau narcissi and daffodils drooped their golden trumpets among narrow blades of green. Lydia wondered whether it was Maisie who had given all this loveliness to Winifred, or whether there were other patients who loved her as deeply.

"Yes. There's an interesting resemblance." Winifred bent her head and began to read.

"I dreamt I was in prison. Someone said: 'Desmond will never come back.' I knew then I would have to stay there all my life. There were a lot of other prisoners, and they smiled at me, but no one spoke to me. I wandered about looking for the gate, but I couldn't find the gate, and I had no key to unlock it. Then I came to a window and saw a garden full of spring flowers and sunlight sparkling on a lot of leaves. The scent of narcissi and hyacinths was overpowering. I said happily: 'I've found the Golden Grove!' There was a woman prisoner dying in a dark and lonely cell, and I think the woman was myself. I knew she could be cured if I could only give her some flowers. I saw a nurse in the cell, looking at the woman, and dangling the key. I asked her to give it to me but she refused. She turned into a giantess and shouted: 'What you want is RED PEPPER!'"

"It's a queer ending," remarked Winifred on a rising inflection, as she scrawled a ring round the word 'pepper'. "What do you imagine that pepper stands for?"

Nervous, Lydia's eyes fell to the hem of Winifred's skirt, and were there arrested. It struck her that in all the hours she had spent alone with Winifred, she had never before noticed Winifred's legs, and how oddly the calves bulged. There was something odd about them—was it merely muscular strength? But the slender limbs of a woman could be muscular too.

"Pepper?" she stammered. "Oh yes, I've dreamt of it often before."

"Have you?"

"Red peppers," murmured Lydia, "and pickles." She knew quite well what they meant. When cooks want to camouflage food that has no goodness in it, they smother it with condiments. "Perhaps," she brought out at last, "it really means 'cynicism'."

"*Cynicism*?" repeated Winifred. "What has that to do with it?" There was a long pause.

"Well, if you read the end bit again, you'll see it was the nurse who was cynical." Not daring to look again in Winifred's direction, Lydia tried to take comfort from her little suitcase lying with her coat on the sofa near the door. But she was too short-sighted to focus it, and the case containing her *Spring and Fall* remained a blur.

"Yes, I see that," said Winifred curtly. "But who's the nurse?"

Lydia flushed. "I think the nurse was you." Her words fell into the shocked silence like an obscenity.

Trembling a little, Winifred's lips twisted. Her eyes paled. "I wondered," she said, and her voice seemed to Lydia to have travelled for hundreds upon hundreds of miles, "if I were the nurse."

"Oh, don't misunderstand me," cried Lydia, tears thickening her voice, "it's only that—oh, I can't explain—" The temperature of the room, which had dropped to arctic, deprived her of breath.

Winifred restrained an impulse to tear the dream into fragments and to order Lydia out of the consulting-room. So that was how Lydia saw her—in cap and apron, scurrying about. . . . "Yes, Sister. No, Sister. All right, I'll attend to it, Sister. . . ." A menial, whom anyone could push around, and from whom anyone could expect obedience. "And I'm cynical too, am I?" she asked lightly. "Well, I have many faults and failings, no doubt, but nobody before has ever called me cynical." Her fingers itched to slap Lydia's impertinent mouth.

Lydia blinked as if she had indeed been struck. She had

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wanted to talk of the Golden Grove . . . of the spring-time of the heart which can dare to surrender itself to love. . . . And she had only succeeded in making herself more obnoxious than ever. When attacked, she was not very good at counter-attack. She shrank a little, turned to the wall, and pulled the button on her cuff which seemed to absorb her. There was an uneasy silence which Winifred had no intention of breaking. At length: "You have always put an unbearable strain on me," muttered Lydia sullenly, without looking up.

"You misunderstand me," retorted Winifred in a voice of ice. "You seem to forget that you come here to undergo treatment."

"But you don't like me," said Lydia, in sudden appeal, flinging herself over to face Winifred. Lying on the couch, in her physical abandonment she felt split wide open. Her nerves, stripped of their protective layers, were exposed to whatever treatment Winifred chose to give them. She felt like some fragment of seaweed, rooted to the sea-floor, its thin fronds swayed this way, that way, by the movement of the water. Strange beauty flowered from the shadowy hollows; strange and frightening forms floated by in the cold half-light; colour, quenched in its normal manifestation of green-gold, and flame and sapphire, glowed here with sinister and unknown strength. Helpless in the grip of a force she could not understand, Lydia lay on her back, watching in acute anxiety every movement of Winifred's guarded face, and felt herself to be without hope.

"Like and dislike have nothing to do with it—don't come into it," snapped Winifred, and made a show of consulting her watch.

"But that's the trouble," cried Lydia, fighting back her tears. For weakness, she could see, would damage her case still further. "Coming here week by week like this, I just can't remain impersonal about you. You don't want me to like you. And if I dislike you, that's wrong too——"

"It's *I* who remain impersonal," interrupted Winifred swiftly. "You *must* like me, or I shouldn't be able to help you——"

"But I want you to like *me*," insisted Lydia, with the courage of despair. "How can you possibly expect me to talk to you freely when I know you don't like me?" She lifted imploring eyes to Winifred's stony face.

"I do like you," returned Winifred, anger fraying her voice. "I like all my patients." She closed her eyes and turned her head to the window. "Some more," she added negligently, "some less." The clear light that struck her eyeballs as the lids slowly rose intoxicated her with a sense of morning. The consulting-room behind her stank of death. Deformity lay stretched upon the couch. An enormous distaste for her job possessed her, and an urge to dissociate herself from Lydia, to whom life was so unprecious that she could let it slip from her nerveless fingers. Every moment wasted in the presence of disease and deformity sickened Winifred with its assurance of futility. She wanted to get rid of Lydia at all costs. She felt she could never bear to look at failure again. . . . Nurse indeed! She clenched her fingers while a fresh wave of anger passed through her, then laid them in her lap and watched them slowly uncurl into the pose of relaxation. One must never let go. Never be caught off one's guard. . . . Some words she had read somewhere floated through her mind. *The goal is coldness of heart.* But she did not know where she had heard them or whether she remembered them correctly. Did it matter much anyway? Hysterics, said the text-books, were all the better for cool treatment. • *Too much sympathy feeds the neurosis.* . . .

For schizoid types she had one method of treatment, and one only. If a patient failed to improve under it, so much the worse for the patient. "We know," she would say coldly, "that we can't help everybody. And it is obvious to me there is nothing more I can do to help *you*." She was quite adept at turning people away. And, of course, they were always surprised when she refused to treat them or speak to them again. But the shock did them good. It had occurred to Winifred recently that perhaps Lydia was heading for just such a climax in her treatment. . . . She got up, smoothing her jacket over her hips, and feeling once again very much the

doctor. "She had Lydia's case, she told herself, well in hand.

Lydia rose too. It was quite clear to her that she could not return, but she could visualise no alternative. Winifred, for good or ill, was in her system, and without help she knew she could not regain control of her own life. She hesitated, not knowing how to express this, for anything she said was liable to offend. Yet silence too might become offensive. To gain time, she folded Winifred's rug, and picked up her coat slowly from the sofa, and shrank into it, hardly daring to lift her eyes from the ground. She was surprised and hurt by the cheerfulness with which Winifred, who enjoyed entering appointments in her diary, exclaimed: "Why, next Monday, you'll be my last appointment." It simply had not entered Winifred's mind then that Lydia would not return. "A great friend of mine," chattered Winifred, dropping the book on her desk, "has sent me a ticket for one of his concerts. He's a Musical Director at the B.B.C. and I'm taking an afternoon off for once to go." She smiled and shook her head. "He's asked me so often. . . . If one were weak-minded——"

She left the sentence unfinished, having succeeded in conjuring Broadcasting House into the consulting-room. Clearly she was bombarded by the entreaties of the great, and could with difficulty withstand them while she condescended to the meanderings of such as Lydia. Winifred was standing with her back to the mantelpiece. In a neat row, the crystal bowls of wood anemones winked at Lydia. On either side of the marble fireplace the orange trumpets of daffodils set the consulting-room ablaze. Winifred did not offer to shake hands with Lydia, who fumbled with the door handle, and turned, just to catch Winifred not quite suppressing a yawn.

There was really nothing to say. Besides, Lydia was frightened that her resolve would weaken and she might after all find herself imploring Dr. Orwin to take her back. It was better to go without putting the finality into words. Somewhere, somehow, she *must* find the courage to make the parting final, but at the moment she felt unequal to a surgical operation. An operation without anæsthetics.

HER TIME was up, but every nerve of her body protested that this was not, could not be, the end. But her brain, frantically erecting defences against unbearable rejection, warned her that to see Winifred again would be disastrous. Later that evening, crouched on the floor of her attic bedroom, Lydia could not keep herself from shivering. It was not right to waste fuel, she should have gone to bed. But she was frightened of the dreams that would wake her, sweating and trembling, in the early hours, and she lit the gas fire and held out her hands to the small glow. She felt empty and ravaged, as if the normal walls that protect the personality had been torn down.

It was Monday evening. Tuesday saw her as usual in Fenchurch Street, climbing wearily the two flights of stairs to her office, because she could not meet the sharp eyes of the lift boy or parry his excessive sociability. Cockneys saw everything, and made allowances for nothing outside their own broad human experience. Harley Street and Fenchurch Street were different worlds. The office where she worked was divided from the inner office of her chief by a wooden partition with windows of frosted glass. Shelves of books and files lay in dust that was seldom disturbed. The office cleaner had swept the floor and emptied the waste-paper basket, but above the level of her feet decay and disintegration had taken over. Ordinarily Lydia saw none of this. For many months the office had presented to her one blur, broken only by the objects of which she could not help but take notice: the scarlet and black headings of the firm's notepaper, the dancing of her typewriter keys against the platen, and the hands of her chief, who played comfortable fingers over a glass paper-weight when he dictated his letters. . . . Lydia took the cover off her typewriter and felt in the drawer for a duster. The drawers of her work-table were meticulously neat. Papers of various qualities and envelopes of differing sizes lay carefully stacked. There were boxes of paper-clips, several utility pencils with

good points, her shorthand pad, and a carton of assorted carbon's.

Her head ached intolerably but her hands felt sluggish. She sat down at her work-table and stared at the box files ranged along the opposite wall. 'Some day I'll clean them,' she thought, and felt suddenly that strength had ebbed away from her. She gripped the edge of the table, trying to draw from its cold and solid surfaces some reassurance of her own reality. When her chief came in, she half rose to say good morning, and agreed that the weather was very warm for so early in April. Noticing nothing, he passed her and disappeared into the inner office. Through the open door she could hear his shoes click as he crossed to his desk, and the scrape of his chair as he sat down, and the tiny creak of a drawer being opened, and the small slam as he shut it again. She noted these things without understanding. Some remote and inaccessible part of her brain had heard these sounds in another life and could interpret them. Somewhere they ran together and made sense. But now she heard them separately and could not connect them with herself. The walls that protect the personality—walls that one assembles, brick by brick, from infancy—had been torn down, and she felt defenceless and raw, as Winifred had no doubt known she would feel. Locked up in her suitcase at the boarding-house lay her script of *Spring and Fall*, but she could no longer deceive herself that it was important. The B.B.C., that pressed invitations on the reluctant Dr. Orwin, could not waste valuable time on the effusions of City typists. *People often return in middle life to some passing ambition of youth. But it's dangerous. It belongs to fantasy.*

Fantasy, however, played little part in Lydia's life during the next few days. She made unusual mistakes in her letters, repeating lines twice, or leaving out vital words. Typing out a specification, she five times omitted a paragraph, and drew on herself a rare reproof from her chief, ordinarily a patient man who liked her because she was 'steady'. He owned a small shipping insurance business, which ran to an office staff of two, and which just about paid its way. His staff of two consisted of his secretary and a boy. Lydia suited him well, for a woman

in the forties, he considered, had either learnt sense or was rubbish, and Lydia had learnt sense. She was obliging and polite, and she did not sit *at* him while she took down his letters. A pretty secretary was all very well in a movie, but he had no wish to transplant one into his own office. Lydia wore her hair smoothly framing her face, in a pleasantly old-fashioned style, and he was spared the distraction of an unsuitable display of silk knees. Till now he had never had to correct her work.

But during this week Lydia could not concentrate. Standing in the lunch queue at the A.B.C., she failed to notice where one picked up a tray, or collected rolls and butter. When her mistake was rectified, she had barely time to get through her lunch. She was hungry all the time, but the array of rissoles and pies on the counter took away her appetite. She drank quantities of tea, and half an hour later regretted that she had not eaten something more solid than sponge-cake or a slab of madeira. Her head ached with frightening persistency; aspirins had little or no effect. She avoided the Tubes, which would have got her back quickly to Bayswater at the end of the day: the oily air, blowing by forced draughts along the hot and crowded platforms, sickened her, and she was afraid she might enter the wrong train. Jogging home by the bus along High Holborn and Oxford Street, she missed the vacant spaces and was still standing when other and later passengers had found a seat. The watchful older set at the boarding-house found her more morose than ever and forbore to question her. Miss Bentley, they told one another sympathetically, looked her age these days, poor thing, no doubt she was tired out; and promptly forgot her in the discussion of the latest scandal about the younger contingent. . . .

Lydia was more than tired. She was exhausted. Feverishly retyping her spoilt specification, or pushed along by the crowds milling round the Mansion House bus-stop, she saw nothing and heard nothing except the conflict that raged in her own mind, and that separated itself into two voices endlessly contending in an argument that went like this:

You *must* hold out against her. If you go on seeing her,

she'll break your heart. You've got to write and tell her that you're not coming back.

But I love her. I've been going to her for so long that she's become part of me. Not to see her would be worse than death.

Stuff and nonsense. No human being is worth so much adoration, and your feeling for her is a purely subjective one. Besides, look how she makes you suffer.

I know that. But I should suffer still more if I thought I should never see her again. Love such as mine *must* eventually evoke a response.

Do you really believe that? What about the telephone conversations you had to listen to as you lay on the couch? Haven't you heard her snub patients who rang her up in terrible distress? She was so curt, wasn't she? Her voice got fainter and dryer, and soon she hung up on them, leaving them to get over it as best they might.

Still, perhaps those particular patients were unreasonable neurotic women?

Neurotic? But that's what you are, isn't it? Is neurosis a crime? Then why go to a doctor at all? You might as well go to gaol right away and save everybody a great deal of trouble.

No, I don't mean quite that. I'm neurotic, of course, or I wouldn't need treatment. But I've never made unreasonable demands on her.

Like Maisie, for instance? True enough. But look how she treats Maisie. Unreasonable demands have nothing to do with it. Maisie gets taken for drives and invited to her house for coffee. You, with your scrupulous conscience, get your sessions cut to half the length you pay for. And she's made it clear enough that, as far as she's concerned, you're something the cat brought in. Why don't you admit it?

I can't believe that love is so one-sided. I've treated her like a goddess, and always studied her feelings. She gets hurt so easily, and I've taken such care not to say anything that would touch her vulnerable spots.

Well then. You admit she's vulnerable. You admit that when you talk about your sex experiences, for instance, or your musical ambitions, she turns and rends you.

She *would* turn and rend me. I take care not to provoke her. But these things are *you*. They're the essential part of you, and by the act of suppression you are assuming an insincerity that makes you deeply unhappy.

Still, I don't know for certain why she dislikes me. I only feel there's a distance between us, which I've tried hard to bridge. Perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps she doesn't dislike me really. Perhaps a lot of it is imagination.

There you go again. She's willing to treat you, as you know. But only at arm's length—as you also know. Why not face the truth, and spare yourself the agony of continual frustration?

But if she hates me as much as you think, why, at the beginning, was she so sympathetic and charming?

Well, it's her living, isn't it? She'd never get any patients at all if she didn't work on their feelings till they can't live without her. After that—well, there's no need to keep up the pretence. The patients are trapped.

How cynical you make her out to be! I can't bear to live in a world where people can be so wicked.

Yet we live in a competitive civilisation. Making money isn't normally considered wicked.

I know. But to manipulate people's feelings—to work on their emotions of tenderness and generosity—to cause them so much entirely unnecessary suffering—

Look, you're not seeing this straight. She doesn't consider she's causing people suffering.

But surely she can see the result?

See it? Yes. But she doesn't understand. At some time in her life she was capable of feelings just like you are perhaps. But she repressed all that for some reason, and now she feels nothing very acutely except anger and hatred.

Why do you say all this? What grounds have you for thinking it?

But you know it's true, don't you?

No. I think there's been a misunderstanding. How can I tell whether the whole thing hasn't been my own fault. Often I didn't respond very graciously or talk very freely, and she may have been hurt by me as much as I was hurt by her.

But she's the doctor, isn't she? Who's supposed to be giving the treatment anyway?

She is a woman, however, and has her feelings like the rest of us. Somewhere I went wrong, and managed to offend her. I'd *rather* think it was my own fault, because then I'd have some hope of putting it right again.

Do you remember listening in to her many phone calls, and how she pulverised nursing staff and patients alike? There was a sister once who phoned from the hospital and you felt pretty sorry for the poor creature after Dr. Orwin had finished with her. She considers nurses her social inferiors.

But perhaps Sister Andrewes had neglected her duty. Perhaps she is always negligent, and patients' lives are at stake.

I give you that one. We'll never know the answer. But you know that, as far as you're concerned, she has felt only repulsion for you for a long time. She wouldn't have kept you on at all if you hadn't made it well worth her while. It's just a money racket, and you might as well admit it. Why not shake free of this appalling dependence that rewards you with nothing but depression and despair? You *must* hold out against her. If you go on seeing her, she'll break your heart. You've got to write and tell her that you're never coming back.

But I love her. I've been going to her for so long that she's become part of me. Not to see her would be worse than death. . . .

Yet life, as Lydia was now living it, seemed more unbearable than the thought of death. Death at least was personal. A release from a torment that was also personal. Around her, meaningless shadows moved and gesticulated. Faces with gaping mouths flashed up at her own, uttering shrill or angry cries, and were blotted out in a moment's oblivion. Yet, with her handbag pressed under her elbow, Lydia followed her usual routine through the week. Gliding through the short cut of Moscow Place each morning, she joined the stream of hurrying figures up Queensway and stood facing westwards at the Bayswater Road bus-stop, and was swallowed up in the avalanche that flung itself daily on the City. She paid her fare,

miraculously did not lose her ticket, and was sitting at her typewriter when Mr. Edgar dashed into the office, as if the spate of business had washed him too ashore on this quiet ledge above the turmoil of Fenchurch Street. With an immense effort Lydia concentrated on her columns and paragraphs of typescript. In the evenings she drifted back to Bayswater, left most of her dinner, and slunk as soon as possible to the privacy of her attic bedroom. Only here could she relax the terrific strain of attention to objects and faces that had gone remote from her. She sank back exhausted, and the voices which all day clamoured for a hearing in the recesses of her mind resumed their interrupted and unending dialogue. In all the world only Winifred was real to her, and Winifred too had become inaccessible.

Courage in this ultimate disaster was not lacking, but Lydia needed some incentive to make the return worth while. Something so deep within her that she could give it no name lay bleeding and exposed from the wound that Winifred had dealt her. She felt indeed as if her body itself had become transparent. The winds of emotion blew clear through her, carrying trails and wisps of her own personality, so that she folded her arms across her breast and bent her head, sitting crouched by the gas fire, and could not hold herself together. In her dreams at night she saw her body stretched on a bed that filled itself with her own blood. Not one wound but her entire body seeped away into a bath of blood. The medieval torturers knew that beyond a certain point the body refuses to suffer and lapses into unconsciousness. Their problem was to stop just short of this merciful condition. Lydia too was tempted to let go, to cry 'I can bear no more' and to pass over into the anæsthesia of oblivion. With her foot on the extreme edge of the precipice she looked back and longed for some thread that would draw her back into the community of sentient but untroubled beings. There were still, she knew, the delicate, sensuous pleasures of the appetites and the nerves. There was music, in which passion, rising to its climax, could absorb pain in form. With calm and perhaps with exaltation, she was capable of losing her identity in the presence of fields restless

with wild surging like a sea round her feet; or the sea itself, its glitter deeply submerged, crashing on a beach of shingle and drawing the whole earth outward into relentless, rhythmical destruction. Beyond Winifred the whole of life moved to some obscure end, and no one could foretell the explosive forces that a chance encounter of one personality with another might set adrift.

In her extreme danger only one solution presented itself. After all, a psychiatrist should understand these things. Lydia decided to go and tell Winifred how ill she was, and to ask Winifred to do what she could to help her.

XXX

THE PLAN, so perfect in its simplicity and so obvious that she blamed herself for not adopting it before, emerged with details incomplete as she bent over her shorthand note-book at eleven o'clock on the following Saturday morning. The office closed at twelve. From then until nine on Monday, Lydia's time was her own. She wondered, not for the first time, how Winifred spent the week-ends. Did she see patients as usual on Saturday mornings? Did she frivol? Or rest? Or go on making money on Saturday mornings? Did she have breakfast in bed on Sundays with the *Observer* slipping off her knees and an ivory telephone within reach of her hand? Was she a coffee-and-fruit-juice addict? Did she . . . But imagination boggled at the thought of Winifred's head prickly with hair curlers and her skin greasy with cold cream. Nevertheless a comfortable picture had presented itself of Winifred relaxed against white pillows, of cool walls, and windows set widely open to catch the wind that moved among the elms of her garden. Lydia's shorthand outlines steadied to familiar curves. She began to type feverishly as the minute hand of the office clock began its slow journey from eleven to the hour of noon.

Lydia had never before got as far as Hampstead, and the journey—a succession of bus rides—began to take on the flavour of an adventure. Buses in London can land the traveller anywhere, and Oxford Circus, between the City and the north-west, was as good a point of departure as Lydia knew. She mounted a City bus bound for the Circus and slipped across by the traffic-lights to Portland Place. A bus for Highgate glided alongside and she joined the queues that were making for the northern suburbs. She was going in the right direction, but timidity prevented her from enquiring of a stranger the shortest way. She preferred to arrive at Winifred's home haphazard, rather than confide her important and private errand to some stranger.

Highgate and Hampstead, however, lie at the terminal points of divergent radii, as any passenger in the Portland Place bus queue could have told her. The conductor was too busy to argue with people who did not know where they wanted to get off. He gave her a ticket for the terminus and told her to change there for Hampstead Village. She assented meekly and was soon rewarded with a seat by a window. All the way northward from Camden Town, the longing for Winifred's physical nearness possessed and blinded her, so that the clear, up-hill streets flowed past her placid as a poem. When she alighted at Highgate, she was aware that the crowds had receded, that the air was cold on her cheeks, and that the space round the trees had obviously been at one time a village green. But the Hampstead bus was waiting, and she had only time to reflect how right it was that Winifred's home should be set in this green and airy oasis above London, when the conductor touched her shoulder and told her she was at the 'village'. She alighted to find an urban highway driven across what looked like untamed country—the cropped and trampled grass, the remains of woodland, the cemented pond, lonelier than the passes of Plynllynn or the walled fields climbing over the spine of Mendips—so that the few loiterers, women with library books and children poking the pond, were unreal to her. Familiar with the narrow streets of the City and the prosperous congestion round Harley Street, she was not prepared for this

suggestion of an older, more leisurely mode of living that still lingered on the heights of Hampstead. Her respect for Winifred increased.

The village lay to her left and she descended into it down what must have once been a cobbled lane. The houses were dark-red and mysterious, the gardens cramped and shadowy with forest-tall trees. Well Walk was familiar to her through Maisie's talk, but she was not prepared for its being so short and so secretive. Staring up at houses, one had the sensation of seeing only their backs. This was not true, but it chimed in with her thoughts about Winifred, who talked so much and said so little. She turned downhill, wondering how long she would have to search in this leafy, lonely maze for Winifred's house, and stopped dead, seeing Winifred's car at the kerb, and knowing that all unprepared she had arrived. Her body was not her own, for every nerve was keyed up to flight, but she stepped forward, conscious of weakness, and laid her hand on the wooden latch of Winifred's gate. The lavender hedge divided garden from road, and there were a few clumps of primula and primrose beneath the bay windows. Budding spikes of lupin were staked on each side of the front door, which stood open. She did not see the garden as she pressed open the latch and shut the gate carefully behind her and walked blindly up the daffodil-bordered path. She had expected the front door to be shut and did not know what to do, standing on the tiled porch and gazing into a corridor of darkness. She shut her eyes and leant against the wall by the porch. When she opened them, primroses and daffodils made a pale light beneath a roof of branches, and obelisks of leafy darkness stabbed the transparent sky. Then memory returned with a rush and she knew she was on Winifred's doorstep. She had been ill, and had come to tell Winifred about it. She loved Winifred, but her love was not returned and she could bear the rejection no longer. *Fearless affection restores the lunatic to sanity . . . the mental pattern of love can be transferred from one mind to another. . . .* She would tell Winifred about herself, for no one was better qualified to understand her.

A door opened within the dark corridor, flooding it with

daylight. She heard Winifred's voice, sharp with surprise—"What on earth are you doing there, Miss Bentley?"—and gathered her failing strength together in a last effort to be reasonable and conciliatory. But the words were forced from her as if another personality spoke through her lips. To the bright shape that was Winifred she flung an imploring hand, and said shrilly, hardly: "Dr. Orwin! I must see you. I loved you, and now I'm ill. It's your doing. Oh, you must help me, or I don't know what will become of me."

"Don't talk such nonsense!" exclaimed Winifred. She came forward into the light of the porch, very poised in a lime-green suit, and stared down at her unwelcome visitor from under the brim of a lime-green hat. Her eyes, very tired, but angry and sparkling with temper, raked the shrinking figure of her patient, who seemed to have nothing more to say, but stood immovable and foolish, twisting her hands jerkily together.

"It's not nonsense," mumbled Lydia at last. "You don't understand, Dr. Orwin. I'm really ill."

Winifred drew in her breath sharply, and began to close the door. "I don't treat patients on my doorstep, Miss Bentley. I'm a doctor." She controlled an impulse to slam the door in Lydia's face and added with long-drawn-out, deliberate contempt: "You have to make an appointment to see a doctor."

"Oh, don't do that!" cried Lydia, to whom, in a flash of insight, her appalling danger lent the energy of desperation. She threw herself against the door, and, stumbling over the frame, fell against Winifred. The impact threw them inwards into the hall, and the door swung open again on its hinges. "I couldn't help it," panted Lydia. "I had to see you. You must listen to me. You're responsible for my condition." She seized Winifred's wrist between her hands and shook it in the effort to make Winifred understand.

White with fury, Winifred disengaged her wrist and hit back: "Don't you dare to touch me again, Miss Bentley. This is assault. If you touch me again, I shall phone for the police and have you ejected from my house."

She looked so menacing that involuntarily Lydia stepped back. But it was obvious to Winifred that, short of compulsion,

Lydia was incapable of departure. She glanced to the phone on the hall table and said acidly: "I can call in the help of the police, you know." For though she had no intention of incurring regrettable publicity, she felt safe to threaten it. Lydia would not know how far she cared to go.

Lydia, however, was past caring for the police. Loving only Winifred, she had tried so often to accept the painful evidence of her rejection, but never until this moment had she faced the depth and intensity of the hatred that now blazed openly in Winifred's face. Weak with astonishment, she could only repeat: "But I loved you. . . ."

"You're being very silly," said Winifred curtly. "In any case, I finished with you some time ago. When you wrote to me at Christmas . . . I permitted you to return against my better judgment."

"But I didn't know what to do for the best——" began Lydia.

"On the contrary," Winifred told her lightly, and her lip curled. "What you did was exactly what I intended. I do not like to waste my time on hysterics."

Lydia said simply: "But I was never hysterical till I met you."

From behind her barrage of absolute refusal to recognise suffering, Winifred explained: "You don't know what you're talking about. Hysteria is a technical term for malingering. Hysterics simulate illness to evade their responsibilities. They are quite worthless individuals. . . . As any psychiatrist would tell you." What more, she wondered, could anyone say to get rid of the creature?

Lydia stood still. The hall, the narrow glimpse of dark garden pitted with broken sunlight, the menacing figure of Winifred—all were blotted out. For a second that seemed endless, she felt herself go blind. Then Winifred's face, enormously enlarged, with every thread in the milky-blue irises delicately and sharply traced, and every eyelash inky against the pulpy, discoloured skin, rushed up at her. She blinked, as if Winifred had struck her, and indeed the blow that had not been dealt vibrated in the air between them. Incredulously, Lydia stammered: "And you call yourself a doctor!"

"GET OUT!" shouted Winifred, her patience quite at an end, "before I have you put out."

"No!"

"This house belongs to me."

Only sheer terror enabled Lydia to hold her ground. She knew, if she went away now, she would never see Winifred again. She had said often enough, and meant it, that if she were offered her life to begin all over again and to manage differently, she would refuse it. Life, with its million-to-one chances of error—a child catching butterflies on the edge of a precipice, and then the dislocated limbs that must somehow be patched up and stumble with the mutilated multitudes to some undreamed of, unwished for, end—had been too great a burden. She had not clung to any one person, or experienced love from one person, since Desmond's death. To experience the need of another's affection was agony to her. She had not wanted to love Winifred, nor did she willingly admit how greatly she had come to desire Winifred's love in return. But there had been something overbearing in the relationship between them, and her common sense and her self-preserving instinct alike had gone down before the onslaught. For the psychiatry had been just that. It was a digging down to the unconscious depths, but with no helping hand to guide her when she lost her way. It was the monstrous irresponsibility of Winifred's refusal to help that frightened Lydia most. Decent people always acknowledged the consequences of their own actions. Unless she could compel Winifred to admit responsibility there would be no end to the injury that had been done to her. "I'm your patient," she said incredulously. "You can't just kick me off to die."

"You're quite mistaken," Winifred told her sharply. "Doctors don't have to have patients they don't want, and I don't want you." Especially, thought Winifred, at the end of such a frightful week. Dr. Treherne's tedious gossip about Dewey on Sunday. . . . And then to be trapped at her own house by the most repellent of her patients. . . . There were limits to what one could bear. Her face impassive, her mind working rapidly, Winifred suddenly remembered that she had refilled the petrol .

tank of her car at the garage behind Harley Street. The car still stood at the kerb, for she had intended using it for visits later. Before Lydia had grasped her intention, Winifred walked smartly out of the front door, pulling it to behind her, clicked out of the gate, and slammed her car door to. She caught a last glimpse of Lydia's white face in the porch, and shouted: "I'm going away for the week-end. I advise you to go home." The car glided off, leaving Lydia alone. . . .

Lydia sat down slowly on the doorstep and propped her chin on her hand. Now that she was quite certain Winifred hated her and there was no possibility they would ever be reconciled, she was surprised how pain receded, leaving her with a sense of lightness and freedom that she had not experienced for years. At any other time, it would have seemed unthinkable to sit thus on someone's doorstep, to be interrogated by any chance caller or to be discovered by the servants. But now it did not occur to her that other women, or men for that matter, might want to be with Winifred on Saturday afternoons, or that domestic staff might be somewhere in the rear of the house. In this she was lucky, for no one did call, and Miss Begg, after washing up the lunch things, sat sewing at the kitchen table. Lydia was not disturbed.

Lydia examined the garden with curiosity, avid for any detail that would make her feel nearer to Winifred. The flowerbeds were a little uncared-for. Roots of beech and elm no doubt exhausted the soil for many yards round. Even so, Lydia could see Winifred was no gardener. Through the open garage door she caught sight of a litter of jugs, rags and cigarette cartons, old newspapers, and an empty milk bottle with a rim of cream. But within the bay windows to her right all was in order. She could not see much here, but a small cigarette-box sparkled above the fireplace, and Madonna lilies were stood in a pale vase on a low table. Lydia was a little surprised to find the room from the outside so exactly as Maisie had described it. She knew it by heart. It had glowed in her imagination until the arm-chairs and the cocktail cabinet, the flower jars and the bureau were become all fluid and transparent; not to be confused with real arm-chairs on which one

could sit, and bureaux at which one could write. Lydia had had no lunch, but she was not hungry. As the afternoon darkened and the air became colder, she sat on, indifferent to the quiet movements in the house and to her own predicament. For it was clear to her, among much that was horrifyingly obscure, that her life had ended when Winifred walked from her. It no longer mattered where she went or what she did. She was no longer herself.

When it was quite dark, she got up absently, stiffly, and wandered down the hill. She had no clear idea where she was going, but her steps led her in the direction of Bayswater. It did not occur to her to take a bus. Her limbs moved, but her brain was stagnant, numbed. No longer in control. She felt no resentment at all, and this surprised her a little. For she had expected such a blow to wound keenly. But the blow had been delivered and she felt no pain. This curious lightness, this sense of exaltation that put her meeting with Winifred into the past or into the impersonal, carried her through the crisis, and guided her steps through unfamiliar streets and many wrong turnings until finally she found herself at Paddington. There, for the first time, she became conscious of bodily sensation. She was weak and hungry. Her head ached. She longed suddenly to be home in her attic bedroom, and she hurried to Westbourne Grove, and turned left, and almost ran up the stone steps to Barham Court, and pushed her key into the Yale lock and pulled the door impatiently to behind her. There was a letter for her in the rack, but she did not see this. She had only one overwhelming desire. To be alone in her little room, and to lock the door on the cruelty and obscenity of the world of living people.

It was two o'clock in the morning. Behind closed doors there was silence, but uneasily, as she crept upstairs, she felt the pressure of life in the house: who slept, who woke. On each landing she waited, leaning on the banister, breathing the used-up, dusty air of a house where too many people lived, and where there was too exhausting an exchange of conversation, and no opportunity for the correction of sense or the refreshment of spirit. She curled herself on her bed

at last, and leant her forehead against the window-pane.

When the sun rose, she emptied her bottle of aspirin tablets into her palm and swallowed them rapidly one after the other. The headache that had begun on Winifred's doorstep was cracking open her skull—cracking open the world. It was impossible, she thought, to expect anyone to get through a decent week's work if one couldn't get any sleep. . . .

XXXI

WINIFRED BREAKFASTED in bed on Sundays. She woke next morning late to find her room filled with dancing droplets of light, and stretched, and turned over, burying her face. She slept high on five pillows, beneath a coverlet of green, cool as water. Her room was cool. Walls distempered egg-shell blue. Door, picture-rail and wainscot painted black. Green electric fire set in pale green tiles. On the mantelpiece a green bowl of waxed flowers, blue, lemon and rose. Cushions on the rush fireside chair, deep pink shot with silver. The carpet pushed its warmth against bare feet: pattern of deep pink, beige and black. Swiss scene on the wall of snow mountains, and in the foreground long grass with marguerites. Carved wooden bears from Lucerne and a trinket-case from Norway. Muslin framing the windows. Winifred opened her eyes and abandoned herself to pleasure, for her room, expensive, non-committal, presented her as she wished to appear to the world.

It was barely ten o'clock. She touched a bell at the bed-head and lay relaxed, her eyelids transparent with sunlight. Beauty is in the eye of the looker, which was as well, she thought, for she did not expect at such an hour to present beauty. A gold sleeping-cap held in her curlers, and the pouches beneath her eyes were soggy with cold cream. This hour of Sunday morning, when the noise and chatter of her life fell away from her, held the bitter-sweet flavour of isolation.

She was alone, and it was a terrible thing to be fifty-four and to have no one dependent, no one, that is, who dared exploit the selfishness of the blood-tie that demands all. Yet it was a miracle to be independent of friends and enemies alike. She could afford within limits to do as she liked. She had so much money that she could afford to cold-shoulder people. She could buy intimacy, and she could enjoy solitude. Her mattress was deeply sprung. Snowy blankets were turned back under hem-stitched linen that would have cost her a month's pay in the old days. Even when she was working at Walthamstow, she had had to ask permission from her landlady to take a bath. And before then she had slept rough at the hospital. Cubicles. No drawer space. A few hooks under a corner curtain to hang dresses and coats. Nowhere to be alone. . . .

A small tap at the door preceded Miss Begg and her breakfast tray. Winifred looked up and smiled.

"There wasn't quite enough milk for your coffee, doctor," said Miss Begg anxiously. "So I opened a tin." She arranged the tray on the bed-table, competently noting Winifred's preferences. Brown sugar. Three-cornered toast. A cut-glass bowl of grape-fruit. By the side of the plate the Sunday paper. A delicious smell of coffee filled the room. The butter was nicely curled and topped with a sprig of parsley. "Are you sure you've everything you want?" Miss Begg tiptoed round the room, and opened the casements widely. A light wind lifted the lace mats on the dressing-table and travelled to touch Winifred's cheek, pale and greasy with cream. "There now, that's too much for you," exclaimed Miss Begg, and hurried back to close them.

"You can leave them open a little," Winifred decided, her hands moving delicately over the tray. "I'll ring if I find them too much."

"Oh, thank you, doctor." Fervent with gratitude, Miss Begg got herself out of the room. She listened for the chink of china behind the door, then threw back her shoulders and hurried off to the kitchen. She breakfasted off toast and dripping, washed down with a nice pot of tea, heavily sugared. She reflected for the umpteenth time how unfortunate it was

that she and Dr. Orwin had both such a sweet tooth. But there! Every cloud has its silver lining, as you might say, she told herself. And how lucky it was that so many of the patients could give Dr. Orwin their sugar ration. Part of it anyway. They got parcels from abroad, she wouldn't wonder. Rich folks had ways of getting round the rationing, and if it wasn't one thing it was another. Not that she wanted to change places with any of the patients. She had seen a few in her time. And she'd rather be a poor housekeeper than a rich loony. Not that plenty of poor folk weren't as mad as hatters too. But poor folks didn't give so much heed to it. Almost as if they expected half the world to be cracked. It was a cracked world anyway. Wasn't much odds if here and there a person went clean off his rocker. Still, thought Miss Begg, plentifully sprinkling salt on her dripping and biting on the side of her mouth where she still had a few useful grinders left of her own, it was a good thing for Dr. Orwin that some folk could afford to take themselves seriously. She owed a good place to them, for, short of doing for some wealthy widower or bachelor (and there were snags to that because some of them expected the Ritz, and what could you get nowadays on a couple of ration books?), she was well enough doing for a professional lady. Out all day, and very careful of her figure. Never ate more than was reasonable and you couldn't grumble at that. Miss Begg poured herself out another cup of tea and spooned off a couple of strangers floating on the top. Now who could that be, wondered Miss Begg, for on Sundays they seldom got uninvited visitors except that old dear, Dr. Treherne, and Heaven knew she was no stranger. But, sakes alive, she hadn't got the scones in the oven yet, and there was a fruit cake to ice for the afternoon.

Miss Begg gulped down the rest of her tea, and opened the glass door of the dresser. Icing sugar. A few drops of lemon essence. A kettle of boiling water. She took the fruit cake she had made yesterday out of its tin and examined it critically. It was dark and had a good smell. Pity she couldn't spare any egg-white. Nothing like egg-white and a drop of blue to give the real brilliance of the icing. She turned the cake upside

down and measured the sugar on to the kitchen table. Grushing out the lumps with a rolling-pin, she thought she heard the telephone bell ringing up in the doctor's bedroom. "Drat that Miss Lawrence," said Miss Begg out loud. Why couldn't she understand the doctor couldn't be bothered with patients on a Sunday? After six days with those loonies, you'd think anyone could see she needed Sunday to herself. . . .

Miss Begg, thought Winifred, biting appreciatively on a pale brown triangle, is learning to make toast at last. Crisp outside but not too hard. Soft in the middle but not too soggy. One wouldn't think that was too difficult to achieve when there was nothing else to think of all day *but* toast—and the few other odds and ends of meals that Miss Begg was paid to produce. Winifred's needs were so modest. She liked her butter to be dewy-cold, and for that reason she had bought a refrigerator. She liked her coffee really hot, and for that she had a percolator and a close-fitting, heavily-wadded cosy. She liked pretty china, and crisp tray cloths, and food done to a turn but not overdone. For this and for the care of her feminine, dustless house, she was prepared to pay Miss Begg one hundred and sixty pounds a year. Privately Winifred considered such a wage extortionate. (She had conducted her engagement with Clifford on very little more, but hospital staff were underpaid in the old days; to-day they earned more and carried less responsibility.) But comfort she must have, and a background of distinction. No vulgarity. No manual work. To be able to invite the right people to one's house without embarrassment. And to be seen dining out with names from Debrett or the more respectable intelligentsia. Toast. It seemed a small thing to make a fuss about. But unless one took trouble with details like toast, one risked the wrecking of an entire dinner-party. Miss Begg was really not hard to train. She knew her place and never answered back. And she really did try to make the toast as Winifred liked it. The trouble was she was so stupid. But then no one nowadays took a domestic job who was capable of doing anything else. All the mothers who brought their problem children to the consulting-room or the clinic were unanimous about that. Domestic

drudgery. How they hated it. How they droned on and complained about it. *Even when I go for a holiday and the children come too, it's going from one lot of work to another. I've still got to do the catering, and keeping the children quiet in lodgings is worse than having it all to do at home.* . . . Holidays? You can keep them. . . . They looked as if they needed a holiday, some of them. When a woman drops out of the fashions and neglects to set her hair at nights, she's done for. The rot has set in. Done for at thirty, some of them, or younger. Not caring at forty. With wisps of the grave-cloths about them, and grass in their ears. . . . Yet their children could be so nice. Yes, she had done some good jobs with their children. Peggy and Godfrey, Iris Bowyer, Sally Horton and Angela Mainwaring. . . . She was substitute mother to them all, and better than their real mothers—kinder, wiser, more patient, more realistic. . . .

Winifred poured herself a cup of coffee and added a dash of evaporated milk. Would it be any use to tell the milkman she needed more milk at week-ends? That priorities were absurdly overdone? Probably not. The working-class were above themselves nowadays. The country was run by Jacks-in-office. She disliked tinned milk and put down her cup in a spasm of irritation. She picked up the *Observer*, glanced at the centre page and threw it down again. It slipped on to the floor disregarded. She pushed away the bed-table and picked up an enamel mirror from the shelf at the bed-head. The face beneath the gold cap peered at her curiously, a frown between its brows, its lips pushed upward in a smile. Hurriedly she untied her shingle cap and loosened the rows of curls above the brow. She must make an appointment with Josephine (Josephine was her *coiffeuse*) and get her to try out a new hair style. This hard line was very ageing. And no longer smart.

The pleasant, lazy day stretched before her. She would lie in bed till noon, perhaps write to Antony, have a look at the reviews in the *Observer*—one must keep up-to-date—take a hot bath and dress in time for a leisurely lunch at one o'clock. Phoebe was coming to lunch, and the new house physician at Walthamstow was coming to meet her. A charity lunch. Miss

Begg would have to do the best she could with the rations. Winifred had turned down an offer of a fowl from the butcher. After lunch she would rest on the veranda till Dr. Treherne came. She wished she had an engagement for the evening. Sunday evenings were the rag-end of the week. She connected this with her childhood and the ringing of the bells for evening service after Sundays when the rector's temper had been more capricious than usual. Samuel Butler said somewhere that clergymen were always at their worst on Sunday evenings. Due to their having had to be so holy all day, and humouring sick parishioners, and assuring wicked sinners they were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. No, that was not quite what he said. But the gist was true. How they had all hated Sunday evenings—Dorothy, Antony and herself. Probably their mother too. Some devil within them always found a pretty pretext for quarrelling after they returned from one of the rector's sermons. Their toys got broken, shrieks split the Sabbath calm. The rector's temper, like Hitler's, was chronically exhausted, and the release of his aggression left nice little red stripes on ears or buttocks. Sighing, Winifred laid down the mirror. She never heard church bells now, and that alone was a good reason for living in London. But she wished she had something booked for the evening. She might do worse than drop in on a cinema. . . .

The front door bell rang. Surprised, Winifred's eyes sought the clock. It would be just like Phoebe to come an hour too early and destroy one's only chance for a proper relaxation. Eleven o'clock, and she had planned to bath at twelve. A man's voice floated up from the hall, punctuated by the soft ejaculations of Miss Begg.

Footsteps came pounding up the stairs. Miss Begg burst in, very red in the face, her eyes popping with alarm and indignation furring her voice. "It's a policeman, doctor, asking for you. I told him you always rested on Sunday mornings, but he wouldn't take no for an answer."

"A policeman?" repeated Winifred coolly. "All right, Miss Begg, don't worry. Tell him I'll be down in a few minutes. You can put him in the lounge." She waited for the door to

close before slipping out of bed and wrapping a dressing-gown over her pyjamas. Licence? Car lights? Or some spot of bother from a patient? Uneasily she remembered how she had driven off yesterday leaving Miss Bentley gaping on the door-step. But that was nothing. Miss Bentley had no business to come to Hampstead. And nothing would be more unprofessional than for her to treat patients in the street, or allow them to intrude on her private life. Her management of the Bentley episode had been professionally correct. . . . Could something have happened to Maisie?

It was Miss Bentley, however, who had got herself into trouble.

"Won't you sit down, Inspector? Yes, Miss Bentley is a patient of mine. Has anything happened to her?"

The inspector was a middle-aged man who bore himself as if he had some secret sorrow. His casualness seemed almost too elaborate to be true. He had a flattish face, with eyebrows that slanted upward and outward, giving him an undeserved appearance of scepticism, for his mouth was honest. When he spoke, his voice was languid and monotone.

"Miss Bentley was discovered an hour ago dead in her bedroom in the boarding-house where she lived. Barham Court. She didn't appear at the usual breakfast-time, and the proprietress sent a maid to call her." It was the usual story. They found her quite dead, but sent, very properly, for a doctor near-by, and telephoned the police. There was a basin full of brown vomit in the room, and the bed-clothes were pulled on to the floor. An empty bottle that had apparently contained aspirin lay on the window-ledge. Otherwise there was no indication that the dead woman had taken her life. There were no relevant letters. But the local doctor seemed sure that the inquest would reveal aspirin poisoning. It was impossible to confirm yet whether he was right or wrong. In the dead woman's handbag they had found a prescription for medinol above Dr. Orwin's signature, and dated only a few weeks previously. A nearly full bottle of medinol was found on the wash-stand. It was hoped that Dr. Orwin might shed some light on the dead woman's state of mind.

Winifred told him that she would be pleased to assist the police in any way she could. It was true that Miss Bentley had been her patient for some time. Speaking offhand, she would say for about a year. The prognosis unfortunately had not been good. Miss Bentley suffered from severe depression, aggravated by her age and proving very refractory to treatment. . . . No, she was not certifiable, and had at no time threatened to take her life. But with neurotic people there was always that possibility. One could do nothing for them but apply the ordinary techniques of psychotherapy. The population unfortunately contained enormous numbers of people who were no more unstable than poor Miss Bentley. . . . Miss Bentley had been referred to her originally by Dr. Somerset of Edgware Road, because of an alleged partial paralysis of the hands. Dr. Orwin was satisfied the condition had no organic basis, and was in fact a hysterical reaction to the realisation of failure in life. Miss Bentley had been something of a musician when she was a young woman, but she had been unable to do anything with her gift. She had also had an unfortunate love-affair. And indeed the whole history of her personal life showed the same instability as her record of work.

The inspector listened intently, making a note now and then and interjecting a question. The case seemed clear enough. But the usual routine would have to be gone through. Who were the dead woman's relatives? Was she keeping company with any particular man just now? Did she drink or dope? . . . Well, that was all he needed from Dr. Orwin at the moment, and he was greatly obliged to her for her clear statement about the dead woman's mental condition.

"She was not altogether a failure, though," he murmured as he followed Winifred through the hall, patting his waistcoat pocket where his note-book lay.

"Not a failure?" queried Winifred faintly, her hand on the latch and quite forgetting to open the front door.

"Let me do that for you," he said, and with every word his voice grew duller and sleepier as if he spoke through wrappings of cotton-wool. "Not altogether. No. We found a letter for her in the rack in the hall. She hadn't seen it. Though it must

have come by the midday delivery. A letter from the B.B.C." His heavy lids flew up like a blind, and Winifred wondered how she could have underestimated his intelligence. "She'd written a script for the B.B.C." Like a lullaby his voice sank lower and lower. It was the perfect bedside manner, daubing those sharp misgivings and self-recriminations of hers with the treacle she had so often used herself. "They must have thought it good. They wanted her to go along and discuss it. What was the title again?" He seemed disinclined to take his leave, and stood, very black and bulky on Winifred's doorstep, blocking the light. "Let me see. Something about the seasons." He appeared to ponder deeply. "Must have been one of those clever ones. But you'll know all about that side of her, doctor. Yes," he repeated, in the maddeningly soothing drawl with which people break bad news. "*Spring and Fall*. That was the name of the script. Couldn't have been too bad if the B.B.C. wanted it. Pity she had to die before she opened the letter——"

XXXII

THE INQUEST on the dead woman was a dull affair. No men came forward who had been intimate with Lydia Bentley during the last years of her life, and she was found to have had no close friends and no relatives at all except a cousin of her stepmother's, who admitted she had not seen the girl for over twenty years. Lydia might have lived, suffered and perished on a desert island. As she left no will, the capital which had come to her from her father via her stepmother passed to the cousin. With it went her few possessions, which were disdainfully turned over to the cousin's charwoman. The manuscripts in the suitcase eventually arrived among the paper salvage, along with a few faded letters and some notes for poems on odd scraps of notepaper. At Barham Court, Lydia's bedroom was freshly papered and the narrow bed changed for a modern

divan. After a decent interval it was let to a young man from Edinburgh who was beginning a job in a research laboratory and was engaged to a country girl from his native city.

And that, reflected Winifred, as she tore Lydia's file into strips and fed it to the waste-paper basket of her secretary's room in Harley Street, was the end of what might have proved rather an awkward and unpleasant affair. Her own evidence, cleverly combining sympathy with the frank recognition that modern life breeds misfits, had made a good impression on the coroner. The inquest had shown that death was due to an overdose of aspirin. It was not possible to prove whether that overdose was intentional or accidental. The circumstances, however, pointed overwhelmingly to suicide. Winifred told the coroner, with just the right accent of regret, how the dead woman had been sent to her, suffering from a condition of the hands described as paralysis which had no organic basis. How she had diagnosed hysteria. And how she had tried to elicit from Lydia Bentley the underlying psychological difficulties which had driven her to seek through illness an escape from her job. The patient had confessed to an early choice of a career in music, which however had been frustrated by family opposition. Winifred had done all in her power to encourage Miss Bentley to find in music and writing an outlet for the creative abilities which she undoubtedly possessed. The work on which Miss Bentley had been engaged during the winter—the manuscript of the *Spring and Fall*—was one in which she had taken the liveliest possible interest. Only the previous Monday at Harley Street they discussed the significance of the 'Golden Grove' symbolism, which had shown up during dream analysis. Miss Bentley made a practice of writing out her dreams very fully. . . . There was much evidence that she resented her job in the City and had resorted to 'glove paralysis' as a means of escape from it. Questioned by the coroner, Winifred described the hysterical technique, and added sadly that hysterics occasionally went further, and staged dramatic attempts at suicide in order to gain sympathy and evade their responsibilities. These attempts rarely ended fatally, for the last thing a hysteric wanted was an escape via

death. But sometimes the affair was mismanaged and death intervened. She did not consider that Miss Bentley had deliberately staged a suicide, however. From her knowledge of the dead woman, she would say that the overdose was probably accidental. Miss Bentley suffered from frequent headaches, and was accustomed to taking aspirin in fairly large doses. The headaches were not readily relieved by aspirin or similar drugs. An excessive dose might be resorted to if the pain proved intractable.

On further questioning by the coroner about Lydia's mental condition, Winifred explained that Miss Bentley was in no way certifiable. She suffered from depression, but the depression could not be attributed to psychosis, and there was no indication for hospitalisation. On the contrary, to have persuaded Miss Bentley to enter a mental hospital as a voluntary patient would, in her opinion, have intensified the symptoms. Hysterics needed to be persuaded to carry on with their work, and to accept their responsibilities. The so-called paralysis of Miss Bentley's hands was not disabling enough to justify her withdrawal from work.

Since Lydia had no relatives to represent her, there was very little interest in the medical evidence. The case was fairly clear, and the coroner's few questions were aimed chiefly to elicit a picture of Lydia's movements on the day previous to her death. Here again, Winifred was able to be very helpful. Regretfully she told the court how Miss Bentley had actually visited her private residence in Hampstead the previous afternoon. She was in a rather depressed condition, owing to the supposed rejection by the B.B.C. of her manuscript, the *Spring and Fall*. Winifred had done her best to bring her to a more optimistic frame of mind, and had suggested they should discuss the subject at her next session on the following Monday. Unfortunately Dr. Orwin had an engagement and was unable to stay long talking to Miss Bentley. However, she felt that she had helped her, and Miss Bentley had seemed brighter and more hopeful in her manner when they parted. She could only suppose that after her departure Miss Bentley had continued to worry about her script, and that the disappointment had

brought on one of her severe headaches. There was always a certain risk with depressed patients, because of their disproportionate responses to frustrations which normal persons could take in their stride. For her own part Winifred was extremely sorry, for she thought highly of Miss Bentley's gifts. It was sad that emotional instability should so often accompany the difficult combination of intelligence with a high degree of sensitiveness.

No other evidence being offered which could in any way conflict with Winifred's gentle but devastatingly clear diagnosis of Lydia's condition, the coroner brought in a verdict of unsound mind, adding that no blame could be attached to anyone for the unfortunate woman's death, and personally thanking Dr. Orwin for the assistance which she had given to the court. This, Winifred told herself, was, of course, entirely to be expected. She was, however, thankful to see the episode finished. Driving back to Harley Street, she banished the image of Lydia's small and desolate figure from her thoughts. She had many other patients to care for, and the living needed her more desperately than the dead. She owed it to her work not to waste her nervous energy in fruitless regret. As she hurried up the staircase to the secretary's office, she had but one thought: to destroy Lydia's file and to thrust the memory of the dead woman away from her for ever. She could hardly wait to get her hands on Lydia's case-history. She made straight for the filing cabinet in the office of the first-floor corridor. . . .

Joyce Wicklow was seated at the typewriter. She worked for several doctors in the neighbourhood and trotted round Harley Street and Wimpole Street for the best part of most mornings. On Mondays and Thursdays she was engaged by Winifred for an hour. To-day was Thursday, and Winifred's attendance at court had upset the routine. It was after lunch before Winifred showed up, and Joyce was in no mood to sympathise with her employer's rather grey expression and agitated hands.

"I'm sorry to be late," said Winifred, anticipating trouble, for she had lost a morning's fees, and did not relish having

half a week's correspondence to cope with as well. "As you know, I was detained at court."

Joyce darted a look of curiosity at Winifred's tall figure bent over the filing cabinet. Joyce's unamiable passivity was belied by a pair of furtive and malignant black eyes which she seldom lifted above her shorthand pencil unless she knew she was not being watched. Winifred paid very little attention to her. She disliked Joyce's spotted complexion, suspected her of constipation, and was irritated by the untidiness of her clothes. She had little patience with a woman whose blouses invariably parted company with her skirt belt and who had not learnt to hook up her suspenders properly. Besides, Joyce wore the most unsuitable colours for an employee. Jumpers of puce and lettuce green, suits with loud checks, and magenta gloves. She was a creature of low intelligence, whose typing needed to be watched and whom one need not overpay. On the whole, Winifred was polite to her, for it was hard to get a part-time secretary, and the smart ones were both impudent and unreliable.

"The case must have been soon over, though," remarked Joyce on a note of question. She was used to the idea of death, which made working for doctors so much more pleasurable than a job in an office. She enjoyed nothing so much as a good cry at a funeral. Wreaths propped against a coffin, the top-hatted figures of undertakers, and jet-black horses nodding gently as they swished their fine black tails from side to side stirred her with a primitive exaltation that made even the Changing of the Guard seem a little superficial. Her very real hostility to Winifred was part of a permanent feeling of resentment that had embittered her since childhood, and was easily evoked by any employer who belittled her or gave her reason to feel exploited. She was so used to it that she hardly knew she hated Winifred at all. . . . And she enjoyed her second-hand participation at death-bed scenes, or, if her employers' patients failed to die, the importance and pomp of serious illness— patients hanging on to life by a degree on a temperature chart; relatives with red-rimmed, imploring eyes; and, in the case of psychoneurotic patients, the thrilling chance

of a relapse or a suicide that might fill the headlines of the newspapers, and spotlight Joyce herself with notoriety. The death of that poor little Miss Bentley had filled Joyce's week with such a glow that even the nuisance of having to hang round Harley Street till Winifred arrived back from court scarcely registered. Had she known it, there was really no need for Winifred to apologise for her lateness. What Joyce passionately required of her was not apology but information. A heart-to-heart across the typewriter. The chance to re-live, in luxuriant, nostalgic detail, Miss Bentley's last hours before the fatal night. And all the exciting events that crowded round the discovery of the corpse. What the landlady said. The terror of the chambermaid. Whether the dead woman left a note. And if so what did it say?

To all this drama Winifred remained obtuse. She was taking one of the buff-coloured files from the cabinet, and with the brief remark: "We shan't need this any more," was tearing its contents to pieces.

Joyce followed her movements greedily, missing nothing of her employer's grim mouth and hurrying fingers. At last she could bear the suspense no longer. "Did she—what was the verdict?" she demanded, and dropped her eyes to avoid Winifred's inevitable stare. There was silence for a moment in the stuffy, quiet office.

"The verdict?" repeated Winifred distantly, and added some more torn strips to the waste-paper basket. "Do you mean Miss Bentley?"

"Oh yes, doctor," assented Joyce, her cheeks patching redly with vulgar excitement. "I wondered—I hope everything went off as you expected?"

"Naturally," replied Winifred, ripping the strips more slowly, "I knew what the verdict would be. Unsound mind, of course. Poor Miss Bentley was always a very bad risk." She let her candid gaze rest for a moment on the furtive, gleaming eyes of her secretary, and added severely, for she was revolted by the woman's gloating enjoyment: "One can only do one's best for such cases. I tried very hard to help Miss Bentley. But unfortunately she was not particularly accessible."

She was annoyed with herself for taking such a lowly person as Joyce Wicklow into her confidence, and turned her back. As far as Winifred was concerned, she made it clear the subject was ended.

"No, I suppose not," Joyce mumbled, swallowing her disappointment. "She might just as well, she thought, have gone home before lunch. It was just like Orwin to keep a thrill like this to herself—the bitch. All the same, you'd think after a *suicide*—! And they had both, come to think of it, known the dead woman better than almost anybody. It was a bit thick. But Joyce was not Winifred's secretary for nothing, and, resigning herself to the inevitable, she gathered her gloves and bag, and rose from the machine. "Well, doctor, I'll come and take your letters now if you don't mind. I've another job waiting."

They pattered across to the consulting-room, outwardly amiable, but each secretly raging at the presence of the other, and each disturbed more than they knew by the silent figure who had visited Harley Street for the last time. "I think I'll open the window at the bottom," said Winifred remotely, and willed her unsteady thoughts to quiescence, while the cool draught flowed round her. It was not the first time a patient had committed suicide. And probably would not be the last. But it was always disturbing. "If only she were not so desperately tired. . . . At my age, she thought, and sat down to the pile of correspondence that had accumulated since Monday, one ought not to have to stand the racket. No one understands what the single woman of over fifty is up against. Women with private incomes—women with husbands—why should they come to her for support, and she with no one to turn to, and nothing between her and annihilation but the energy of her body and the agility of her mind?

She began to open her letters, dictating listlessly, curtly, while Miss Wicklow's pencil flew across the pad and the April sunshine filtered into Harley Street through the low-lying, smoky sky. There were several cheques to be paid into the bank. Some of the letters from patients were frankly love-letters. Doctors implored her to make time to see new

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patients. She was invited to chairman an important meeting of educationalists on mental hygiene. She compelled herself to concentrate.

Half an hour later she was so busy with present and future that the past had begun to fade. . . . The dead knew nothing of the thousand empty hands that plucked at the living. By the end of Thursday afternoon Winifred had managed to forget Lydia Bentley.

XXXIII

IT WAS not until a week later that Jean heard the news of Lydia's death. Meanwhile she had reproached herself for not answering Lydia's letter with its enclosure of the poem. 'Be guided by Miss Lawrence and myself,' Lydia had written, 'for it must surely be obvious to you that you can come to no good by associating with Dr. Orwin, and you may receive damage that you can never repair. I was a poor sort of creature myself when Dr. Orwin started treating me, but at least I was carrying on my job and managing somehow. Now I've gone all to pieces and God knows what will become of me. And as for poor Miss Lawrence—well, you wouldn't like to become like her, would you? Utterly dependent on another human being, and therefore incapable of experiencing true happiness. . . . Don't think I'm preaching, for no one knows better than I that I haven't the right. But if I had a job like yours—a husband who worshipped me and three sons—I think I'd feel they were worth living for. Dr. Orwin isn't really important, you know. She's rubbish really—'

The words carried their own conviction, but Jean was unable to accept them. Common sense triumphed through the day while she busied herself with the household chores, and there were moments when it seemed more important for Hugh to eat his cabbage than for his mother to forget Croydon in the

memory of the transcendent experience of intimacy with Dr. Orwin in Harley Street. But her common sense lacked stability. The image of Winifred shattered the protective crust of everyday habits, and her longing for Winifred overwhelmed the bonds that tied her to the children and Carey.

'Perhaps,' continued Lydia, 'you won't get much meaning from the poems I lent you. Hopkins isn't everybody's choice, and you will either like him or find him complete glibberish. No, I was wrong to lend you Hopkins. You have so much love in your life already that you don't need, as I do, to allay the anguish of your spirit by weeping with other people's tears. You have the *Golden Grove* in your own life—the *thing itself*. Do try and understand what I am telling you. Dr. Orwin hates life really and she is afraid of emotion. You will never touch her heart, and you will break your own with trying. Like I have. This poetry is not for you. It is for people of my kind who have been deprived of a love we thirst for and whose inner world feels like a desert. Oh, I know that this loss is an experience through which we could pass to find our salvation. But I am afraid, and I need help.'

'“O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep. . . .”

'Do you think Dr. Orwin is capable of giving help in a danger like this? No one can help who has not been willing to surrender to that death which is the absolute prerequisite of personal salvation. But if she is unwilling to lose her own life in order to save it, how can she help you and me to come through the gate of death and find the new life which would cure us of our personal sickness. . . . If I could only make you understand—'

Well, Jean reflected humbly, turning Lydia's letter over in her hand, while she listened automatically for the creaking of Hugh's cot that would signal the finish of his after-dinner nap,

Lydia was right. All this talk of 'Golden Groves' and personal salvation conveyed very little to her. She did not understand poetry, and it had not ever occurred to her that there could be any real connection between poetry and life. Life—well, it was what she did day after day, without thinking, and which indeed was done more quickly and efficiently if one were not troubled by the esoteric and the strange, as Lydia seemed to be troubled. Jean's life was too full already, and perhaps it would have been better for Lydia if she had had real worries too. 'Golden Groves' were a charming idea, but they were no help when the milkman cut down the ration or the butcher hid offal below the counter. Jean took conscious pleasure in her preoccupations, which served as a bulwark against the tremendous experience that was battering at her fragile defences, and which continually threatened to overwhelm her. But their mutual suffering drew her closer to Lydia, and the impact of Lydia's more developed consciousness enabled her to stand outside her own rather commonplace little personality and admit that there was a whole world which till now had remained closed to her.

And if the poetry of Hopkins was still beyond her, she could enter into the feelings that had prompted Lydia to write the poem which was enclosed with the letter, and to which Lydia drew her attention in a postscript. 'I think you will understand the desperate condition to which Dr. Orwin has brought me if you read this poem which I wrote about her a few days ago. You see, for some reason, she readily analyses a patient, and it is true that analysis is necessary for people as neurotic as I am, or how could we discover what is making us ill? But when it comes to concrete help—that part of the treatment for which the analysis was only a preliminary—she turns her back and leaves us to escape from the débacle as best we may. It's so terribly *dangerous*, and that's why I'm writing to you, because for you there's still hope. It is three o'clock in the morning, my head aches persistently, and I am very tired but quite unable to sleep. I have not been able to get you out of my mind since you left me this afternoon. So I have been lying awake thinking about you, and wondering how I can best

help you to avoid the disaster that has fallen on me. I don't know really. But I can at least send you the poem. Don't bother to return it. Read it, and then go and talk to that nice husband of yours, and feast your eyes on those three lovely children. And ask yourself: Is Dr. Orwin worth it?"

Jean sat down in the rocking-chair by the kitchen boiler and unclipped the poem, which she already half knew by heart. The bungalow was quiet, for the elder boys were at school and Hugh was still asleep. Through the open door into the garden she could see the crab-apple tree congested with blossom. A light wind moved the clusters, whose diamonded sunlight glittered as if a million will-o'-the-wisps hovered and fluttered over the squat and sturdy trunk. From neighbouring hawthorn and lilac fragments of the spring chorus started up, and were assimilated into the murmur of the suburban background. To the muted accompaniment of distant traffic, Jean repeated the poem aloud to herself. Appalled yet comforted, terrified yet soothed, she took to herself the voice of Lydia, and in Lydia's suffering found an assuagement of her own. The poem was headed: 'Psychotherapist'. It was obviously addressed to Dr. Orwin.

You broke into my prison, but would not
Stay to share the sun.⁶ Alone,
Silence-enchanted, I could shed no
Tears to relieve the fevers of the bone.
Could thirst only—trembling for the stone,
And the ache of light on eyeballs long
To unquiet glooms and steeps accustomed grown.

Those unquiet glooms were all my knowledge
Of the prejudiced, the urgent world.
Sleep-walking on the silver steeps,
I passed through walls. My fantasies unfurled,
And, through the expanding darkness hurled,
Came with the feet of love. . . . You
Came where I sat expectant, hands uncurled.

I sat expectant, but with O
What lapse, what plunge, to death to find
The prophet had no words, the healer
No hands. You left me there in durance, blind,
My frailest will-to-live resigned
By you to will's paralysis,
The rejectant body, and the dreaming mind.

The dreaming mind that history
Rolls on the tumults of derision,
Whose tides submerge our private worlds.
Your crystal dazzled, but I found no vision.
Submissive then to your decision,
I bade my rocking heart resume
The sleep you broke, when you broke into my prison.

Although she did not yet know it, this was the last communication Jean was ever to receive from Lydia. Nearly a week had still to pass before she heard the news of Lydia's death. . . .

It was on the following Saturday morning that Maisie turned up, holding by the hand a thin child in a grey kilt whom she introduced as Angela Mainwaring. "A pupil at the school, my dear. I wondered if you would let her play with your boys? She's a dreadful little tomboy. And she's simply aching to climb the exciting trees in your back garden." Hatless, straight-shouldered as a dancer, her thin face twitching, and very sure of her welcome, Maisie floated into Jean's hall, pushing the child in front of her. The sleeves of her short coat, slung from the shoulders, hung empty over a dress of rich red stuff.

"Why, yes." Jean shrank a little and put a hand up to the hair straggling on her neck. She still wore her apron, for she was mixing a pudding when Maisie knocked, and had expected to find the baker. "Do come in, won't you?" She looked distractedly down at the child who was straining on tiptoe, looking hungry, and called: "Johnny! David! There's someone come to play with you."

Her sons in khaki knickers and darned pullovers came tumbling in from the garden, discovered the visitor to be a girl, and screwed up their faces in disgust.

"She likes climbing trees," put in Jean hastily. "Suppose you take her in the garden, and show her the crab-apple." She looked doubtfully at Angela's fair head and fragile arms. "Now mind and don't be rough. My children," she apologised to Maisie, "get so wild."

Maisie swept this aside. "Angela's a terror. Perfect little bully she was, in the kindergarten."

Jean followed Maisie in to the sitting-room and refused a cigarette. She would pop her pudding into the oven, she said, and be back in a second. She left Maisie with the ash-tray from the top of the piano and flew up to her bedroom. Tucked her hair into a net. Swabbed on powder. Flew down to the kitchen and finished the pudding. But what a time, she thought, to call on a housewife, and closed the oven door and set the Regulo. Anyone would think housewives had nothing to do all day, and could knock off for hours at a stretch and no one feel the difference. Yet as she opened the sitting-room door again she could not go on pretending she resented the interruption. And with the colour throbbing in her cheeks she looked almost young again, while Maisie lit one cigarette from the stub of another, praised her children, and asked her if she had read the result of the inquest.

Jean sat up, startled. "What inquest?"

"But, my dear——!" exclaimed Maisie, the importance of her news, and the luck of finding Jean uninformed, softening her strident voice to a conspiratorial whisper, "Lydia Bentley, of course. Didn't you know she was dead?"

A little white round the lips, Jean stammered: "Dead? Lydia? No, I didn't know——"

"But, my dear. . . . Don't you read the papers?"

"Not always."

"Don't you? It was suicide," announced Maisie triumphantly. "She killed herself with an overdose of aspirin."

Jean's hand closed slowly on a corner of the emerald cushion. The buff-coloured room melted all round her and the angular

figure of Maisie wavered as if seen through water. For so long she had been dreading something, but she had not connected this dread with Lydia Bentley. Somewhere in the hinterland of her mind a tragedy had awaited this precise moment for its unfolding; but what she had consciously dreaded was some personal disaster. She had not regarded the danger as in any way threatening Lydia, who had seemed wiser and cleverer than herself. She remembered with compunction how she had clung to Lydia and asked from Lydia the secret of her strength, when the burden of Dr. Orwin had proved too heavy.

"Are you all right?" Maisie asked her anxiously. "I'm afraid what I've said has been a shock."

Jean shook her head. "I'm all right. It was just. . . knowing her, you see." She groped for words that would adequately express what Lydia had been to her and was unable to find them. She had met Lydia only a few times in all. She had heard her play the piano in this room, singing to the children in her uncertain treble. They had had tea together. Jean had smiled at Lydia's fumbling way with china and felt a little superior because she could bath a child better and knock up a batch of cakes. And, in return, Lydia had opened to her the door upon another world.

"Yes. . . . She was an unusual person."

"Unusual?" repeated Jean, blinking back her tears and drawing a long breath. "'Unusual' isn't a word I'd have thought of myself. But yes. It does describe Lydia Bentley."

Maisie peered at her hostess with concern. Jean's broad, pleasant face had coarsened imperceptibly under the impact of the shock. Her mouth hung open, swollen and stupid-looking. Powder did not disguise the deep pores of her nose, which in a darker physical type would have suggested the negroid. Incomprehension transformed her maternal placidity to something uglier: more abject than the animal, less generous than the human. To Maisie's brittle distinction she presented an absolute lack of style, for Maisie had expected ejaculations of horror, a spate of pertinent questions, a chewing over together of their common experience.

"It *has* been a shock. Have you got some brandy or something handy?"

"No, I don't want anything."

"Let me make you a cup of tea."

"No, really."

"I wouldn't have told you," said Maisie, taken aback by the success of her story, and a little annoyed because Jean seemed incapable of discussing its finer shades, "only you were bound to hear it some time. And as you and Lydia were friends—I quite thought you'd have seen it in the papers. But there—I don't suppose you've a lot of time for reading."

Jean shook her head. She was not a gluttonous reader of newspapers at any time. Often the *Express* lay all day on the hall-stand before she found a moment after tea to skim the headlines and read the potted fashion or philosophy on the women's page. When Carey threw the evening paper at her after supper she let it lie three times out of four until Hugh was bedded down for the night. And then the elder boys quarrelled, or dawdled in the bath, and what with one thing and another her hands were full till the nine o'clock news came on. By that time the evening paper was a few hours dead, and she could expand her fancies more freely with a magazine story or get on with some mending.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have let you know——"

"Oh yes, I'm glad you did," interrupted Jean feverishly. "I ought to have guessed," she went on wonderingly and was tantalised by some memory beyond the circle of her daylight consciousness that could have foretold everything. She was overwhelmed by the sense of her own stupidity. Lydia had tried to tell her in the subtle, evasive way that was the only way in which Lydia could communicate. And she had failed to catch the meaning. But she could not remember what it was, if anything, that Lydia had said. Perhaps it was something which she had pointedly left unsaid. A profound resignation that resolved in irony the cruelties and baseness of life. . . . But still the query remained. . . .

Maisie leant forward confidentially. In the garden they could hear the shouts of the children pretending to be Indians,

piercing the suburban streets with war-cries, Angela, no less vehement than the younger boys. "She did quite a job with little Angela Mainwaring," Maisie told Jean. "I don't hold with all this psychiatry for children. But I give her Angela Mainwaring. My God! When I first saw that child——!"

"Who did a job for her?" asked Jean, bewildered.

"Why, Winifred, of course!" Maisie retorted. "Didn't you know little Angela was the terror of the school? It was I who told the mother to take her along to Dr. Orwin."

"Then she does do *some* good?" asked Jean wistfully.

"Oh yes." Maisie looked a little contemptuously round the unindividual room. Off-white walls. Buff upholstery and buff curtains. Piano with candlesticks. Door with chromium handle. *You can supply that touch of brilliance by the colour of your cushions.* "Oh yes, Winifred has her uses. So long as she doesn't get a patient whose intelligence is too much for her. Like me, for instance. Or little Lydia Bentley . . . Or you," she added politely.

"Oh, I'm not clever," Jean assured her earnestly. Indeed, she felt drab as a hedge-sparrow addressing a bird of paradise. Out of her depth. Agonies of doubt wrestled with each other for her attention. For instance, what was it Lydia had said that should have warned her? But also, and at the same time, were the children climbing up the crab-apple tree and, if so, would they be safe? Had she turned the oven on too high? Ought she to offer Maisie a cup of tea?

"With clever patients," Maisie was saying, as one to whom psychiatry held no mysteries, "she's worse than useless. She's a menace."

"What I can't get over," Jean said tearfully at last, "is Lydia Bentley feeling so bad about it as all that. I knew she was feeling bad—— but if I'd realised——"

"Did you have any idea," asked Maisie curiously, crossing one elegant, sinewy instep over the other, "that she was at the end of her tether?"

"She wrote me a letter——" admitted Jean, and fell silent. "Did she?" The hawk eyes snapped, and a half-smile flitted over Maisie's haggard face. She was going to hear some tit-

bits after all, the visit to Croydon would not be wasted. "Go on. *Dò* tell me. What'did she say?"

"She said——"

"Yes? Go on."

"Oh, I ought not to talk about her!" cried Jean, and burst into tears. For there was something horrible in the gloating eyes that bored into her own. It was indecent, just because Lydia was dead, to cut her up into little pieces and pore over the fragments; to expose her secrets, and to extract a thrill from the very agony that had driven her beyond their help. Sobbing into her handkerchief, Jean resolved to protect Lydia from this revolting curiosity. Indeed, she *could* not talk about Lydia. For she remembered Lydia's poem, and her own failure to answer its anguished appeal. The 'lapse', the 'plunge to death', which had seemed to offer no more than an expression and channel for her own misery, was literally a cry from the edge of the abyss. She had failed to take poetry seriously, and so she had failed to take Lydia seriously. And now she would never be able to help her. . . .

XXXIV

JEAN WAS unable to forget Lydia. Day after day, as she tried to rouse herself from brooding when Carey talked of the office, or the children demanded stories and kept up their ceaseless cross-fire of questions, the image of Lydia grew steadily brighter and her presence lay like a load of sorrow that she would have been glad to evade but dared not. In all the world Lydia had had only one friend to whom she could turn. She had confided her burden of misery to Jean, and Jean had failed her. In the end there was no one who cared sufficiently whether Lydia died or lived. So she had died as she had lived: silently, without protest, and without hope. In the weeks that followed

Maisie's visit, Jean knew what murderers feel to whom not even the relief of punishment lies ahead, and who must carry remorse unshared until death annihilates all.

In addition, she was miserable enough over her own relationship with Winifred, and struggled constantly against her own restless, tormented preoccupation with the mother-image that seemed to have become a part of her own personality. Carried along, as she had to be, by the routine—potatoes to peel, the front door to polish, weeds to pull from the currant borders below the lilac—she too knew moments when the walls that had confined her life fell away, and beyond was treacherous ground where no foot could rest and the horror of sunlight turned to blood as she struggled to free herself from the nightmare. Carey, unable to avoid the implication of her sudden fits of weeping, her listless movements as she dragged herself around, promised her she should return to Winifred soon and complete the cure. Privately he determined to cut down his smoking and make his civvy overcoat last another winter. He would have to manage the fees somehow. But his plans were to be given another twist by Jean herself, who unexpectedly took the matter into her own hands, and acted with a promptitude that left no time for consultation or second thoughts.

For the message of the poem was not, after all, addressed primarily to Jean. Putting away the dishes one morning towards the end of May, Jean turned on her way to the china cupboard and stared through the open kitchen door at the fallen petals of the crab-apple, lying curled and brown on the springing grass at the roots. . . . There were others who might have suffered as she was suffering and Lydia suffered. There were hundreds of patients who had gone to Harley Street before them. And there would be hundreds who would follow after. Her burden was no isolated experience. The shock of this realisation lifted from her the dead weight of remorse and guilt, and gave her something definite to do. For the first time in weeks, it occurred to her that Winifred had not read the poem, and might not even guess why Lydia had died. Naïvely she concluded that Winifred ought to be told, for, if she did not know the consequences of her actions, how could she help

repeating her mistakes? And also, deeper and more urgent than her concern with Lydia, Jean's own longing and need for a resumption of her contact with Winifred powerfully reinforced what presented itself to her mind as a pure desire for justice. An enormous relief surged through Jean as she realised that there was nothing to prevent her from seeing Winifred that very afternoon, if she could get a neighbour to mind the children while she went to town. And this she was able to arrange. . . .

The poem was folded inside her handbag as she jogged up to Victoria again on the now familiar midday bus. The sober streets, which housemaids once knew only from area windows and from which now their families overflowed on every landing, fell away from the plate glass at her shoulder. Jean watched without interest the barrow-like displays of the greengrocers, where housewives queued for oranges, and the colourless shelves of the cake-shops, and the markets for old junk screaming their scarlet invitations to Look Round With No Obligation in letters seven feet high. The bus plunged into caverns of gloom under railway arches, and emerged into daylight where gigantic hoardings sang of joy and of glory, displaying for her emulation faces which had drunk X's beer or been nourished by Z's vitamins. The river came into sight. Warehouses shrouded in haze. Abrupt walls rising from the primeval mud itself. A few ships, intimidated by the desolation of brick all round, leaning up against the mud or lounging at anchor on the ebbing tide. Terraces closed in again. Junk. Dirt. Insurance offices. Hurrying figures, chin on breast, dodging traffic. Then neon lighting, loungers at fish-and-chip bars, and the steps up to the New Victoria Theatre. Jean hoped she would get to Harley Street before Winifred left for the day!

She was clutching the poem in her hand as she hurried out of the bus at Bond Street, and dodged between the crowds round the fruit-stalls by D. H. Evans's, and slipped by way of Wigmore Street into the lower end of Harley Street. Her luck held. Winifred's Morris was at the kerb below the consulting-room. Jean strolled to the corner of Winifred's block and leant her back against the area railings. From here she had a

good view both of Winifred's green front door and of the buff Morris below it. She curved her palm round the iron spike that decorated the top of the railings. The hard and weathered surface of the spike reassured her. She was no longer afraid of Winifred; no longer paralysed by humility and the breadth of the gulf that separated them. All her pent-up resentments, her familiarity with the clock-face in the waiting-room as the hands agonisingly crawled and proved to her how little Winifred cared for her, all the snubs that had marked the progress of their intimacy together, rushed up and spilled over in a torrent of words that only needed the presence of Winifred to become articulate. And she had over two hours to wait. Two hours in which the agony of her own sufferings illuminated for her the path that Lydia had followed. For life had been tolerable for Jean until she consented to undergo this psychotherapy. And now the longing for Winifred and the certainty of rejection filled all her days with misery and her nights with terrifying dreams. For Lydia the tension had become too great. Some thread snapped. Knowing nothing of Lydia's last interview with Winifred at Hampstead, Jean had the feel of the entire situation clear at last. She wanted only to meet Winifred face to face, and to tax her with the responsibility for Lydia's death.

It was nearly half-past five before the shining green door swung inwards for the last time, and Winifred, in a suit and hat that were new to Jean, came running down the steps and disappeared into the interior of the Morris before Jean could reach her. Terrified of losing her quarry, Jean slipped round the back of the car, slammed down the handle of the door and shot into the seat beside the driver's. Winifred, astonished, opened her mouth to protest, but, meeting Jean's blazing eyes, thought better of it and remained silent.

"I know now why she committed suicide," Jean accused her in a voice that Winifred did not recognise—a new voice, as hard and cold as Winifred's own. "Poor Miss Bentley, I mean."

Winifred went white. This totally unexpected attack from one whom she regarded as negligible, as socially and in every

other way her inferior, took her breath away by its self-confident, bold and insolent disregard for her person and her position. Her authority failed her, for Jean was obviously unimpressed by it. But disregard touched her less nearly than the recall of Miss Bentley, of whose death she preferred to remember nothing, and whose case was closed, like other unsuccessful cases, of which every psychiatrist, she was sure, must have had innumerable examples.

Blind rage took away her breath. She clenched her hands and waited till the surging blood ebbed from her thighs, and then said in slow and dangerous tones: "You must be mad, Mrs. Martin. Get out of this car before I summon a policeman and have you put into the street."

"Go ahead then and do it," Jean challenged her. "Do your worst. I'm not afraid of you any more." They stared at one another as if, in their mutual anger, they saw one another for the first time.

They were sitting more closely than they had ever sat in the consulting-room. Thigh to thigh, their elbows touching. Winifred withdrew haughtily into her corner. She was very elegant in a suit of greeny-blue material and a wide, dipping hat with ribbon streamers. Orchids were pinned to her shoulder. Vindictively, for she knew that Carey Martin could not afford a car, Winifred reminded her: "This car is *mine*, Mrs. Martin. And I have nothing to say to you. I order you to leave." Scraps of conversation, images from Jean's dream material, flickered in her mind, and she gathered all her feelings into a sentence that she knew would really hurt. "Doctors," she told Jean, her lip twisting, "don't have to have patients they don't want. And *I* don't want *you*."

"But you'll have to listen to me," Jean cried, for Winifred's attitude served only to clarify the suspicion that had gripped her ever since she had understood the message of Lydia's poem. "I know now about Miss Bentley. She loved you, and you killed her. How can I be silent about something as terrible as that?"

"You don't know what you're talking about," said Winifred shrilly. "You forget yourself."

"But I *know* about Miss Bentley," Jean insisted. She was conscious of Winifred's finished smartness, but it no longer oppressed her. She was amazed that she had ever thought Winifred beautiful. The blue eyes, seen close to, were watery and grey as snail's flesh, and the reddish eyebrows straggled down over the lids. Winifred's jaw was large and slack, the mouth a bloodless line. Inside the car, empty cigarette cartons and burnt-out matches were scattered over seats and floor. Brown paper and string, old newspapers, and the cellophane wrappings of chocolates lay where they had been thrown. Dust and cigarette ash obscured the carpet. Jean's housewifely fingers itched. Just a slut, she marvelled, and the pity of it misted her eyes. For Lydia was dead, and would never know that Winifred had not been worth dying for after all.

Winifred said suddenly: "You are no longer a patient of mine, Mrs. Martin, and I have nothing to say to you. And I have an appointment."

But Jean had only just begun. "You have no sense of justice," she said accusingly. "Miss Bentley—Lydia—was your patient, and you let her die. And now I'm ill through your fault, and you'd like me to die too."

Winifred let it be seen that such childishness could make her smile. But she was very white as she answered: "No doubt, if you continue to act like Miss Bentley, you will end in the same way. I recognised Miss Bentley's suicidal tendencies from the start."

"You don't understand," breathed Jean, shrinking into herself. For she could not quite rid herself of the feeling of horror that had gripped her ever since she had read Lydia's poem. Anyone who was human—even Dr. Orwin—must be moved by the pity and horror of a life wasted. And Lydia had been *good*. Jean saw her quite clearly as she sat on the end of her bed that day when Maisie called, her cheek hidden by the wings of hair, and her thin hands still; and how she had looked up and silenced Maisie's chatter and Jean's own stupidity by the intensity of her silence.

"I want you to read this." Jean put the poem on Winifred's lap. Lydia's tiny handwriting, so clear and neat, lay there

beneath their eyes, and against her will Winifred asked: "Where did you get this—thing?"

"It's Miss Bentley's—her own composition," said Jean more easily, trusting the poem to do its own work.

"I'm afraid it has nothing to do with me."

Jean put a hand on Winifred's sleeve imploringly. "But if you read it you'll know what I mean. Miss Bentley loved you so much. And you were so cruel to her. Read it and you'll see."

Winifred felt very cold, but she shook off Jean's hand, and forced her voice to sound casual. It was essential to get rid of Jean, yet she had an uneasy feeling that by her own volition she was forcing history to repeat itself. Two suicides within a month would ruin her. But Jean must be silenced. "You must understand, Mrs. Martin," she said slowly, "that, whatever you say, no one will believe you. You are a very sick person yourself. As your doctor, I should be justified in recommending you to have treatment in a mental hospital." This unexpected attack had the effect it was meant to. The icy words and Winifred's portentous expression alarmed Jean, who had no idea what doctors could or could not do if they wanted to. Winifred saw her advantage and pressed home the attack. "I had been thinking for some time of advising it to your husband."

Jean was appalled. No warning from Lydia or Maisie had prepared her for this. Intellectually she had bowed to their superior knowledge, but in her own simple heart she did not really believe that anyone in Dr. Orwin's position could be a black-hearted scoundrel, a conscienceless fury, an imp of hell. "I don't know what to say." And it was true she did not know what to say. In her experience, wicked people were just wicked—black-marketeers, concentration-camp guards, hooligans who murdered for robbery, parents sent to prison for cruelty to their children. But Dr. Orwin, so gentle, so wise, with her public-school accent and her expensive clothes—all the indefinable quality of gesture and restraint that Jean thought of as 'taste'—bawling at her like a coster, and then stabbing her with such subtle cruelty, every hit below the belt

—frightened her to death. She thought she had never known what wickedness was until now.

But Winifred was frightened too. The exaltation she had felt at pricking this bubble of self-absorption, this rude, naïve and lumpish creature, evaporated quickly. "I don't often get angry," she had once told Maisie half-jokingly, "but when I do I feel homicidal." But this kind of self-indulgence was highly dangerous. She took a hold on herself and forced herself to meet Jean's eyes with calmness. "And now, Mrs. Martin, will you go home?"

"But I'm not in a fit state to travel," protested Jean, who, now that her anger had spent itself, would have asked nothing better than to lay her aching head against Winifred's shoulder and plead for forgiveness.

"I said, GET OUT," snapped Winifred, who could sense her opponent collapsing, and was beginning to feel certain she would have no further trouble.

"No, please don't send me away. I know, if I go, I shall never see you again."

Winifred watched her with cynical, taunting eyes. It was her chance to say something so final, so overwhelming, that Jean would collapse and slink away, shamed into silence for the rest of her life. Winifred laughed lightly. "I had not intended to see you again, Mrs. Martin, under any circumstances. Your case was closed some time ago."

"But *why*?"

"Because you're beyond me," said Winifred gravely. "I told your husband months back that there was nothing more I could do for you."

"He didn't tell me that."

"But I told him."

So she was a liar as well. Helplessly Jean leant back in her corner of the car, and for one wild moment wondered if she dared take hold of Winifred's arm and cling to her, and implore her to unsay the awful, terrifying things she had said; to become herself again; to exorcise the devil that was looking at her through Winifred's eyes. But she knew she was up against something that was impervious and stony. She has

seen people suffer too often to be moved by it, thought Jean, and realised that this was only partly the explanation. Winifred was not human, she thought. Jean remembered how she was often vexed with the children because they dropped things, or left their rooms untidy, or told lies. But after she was angry, she could not bear the defiance and desolation on their childish faces, and put her arms round them, and love flowed again between them. A two-way process. The child would bury its face in her dress, and she would lean her cheek on the small, soft head.

Winifred was saying: "As it happens, I am driving to Victoria myself, and I will drop you at the station. But remember, Mrs. Martin, this is the last thing I shall ever do for you. . . ."

Winifred drove fast. This was another surprise to Jean, who had always expected Dr. Orwin to be a 'womanly' driver. Winifred took risks, driving blind round corners, neatly getting in front of buses, and giving an exhibition of daring that kept Jean in a state of physical tension. Jean gripped the tassel of the blind and tried not to notice the traffic, while all the time she listened with growing surprise and scepticism while Winifred, who was talking in a swift monotone, gave her a resumé of her case, and let it be clearly understood that anything she now suffered was entirely her own fault.

"You are suffering from obsession," Winifred told her crisply, "because you have evaded for years the fulfilment of your duty towards your husband, and this gives you a sense of guilt. You try to appease it by an excess of conscientiousness in your household duties and with your children. You must try to control your tendency to please yourself, and remember that you are a wife as well as a mother. You have quite strong feelings and must learn to control these too. Try and behave like an adult, and do not give way to childish reactions. With regard to me, you made the mother-substitute of me at first, but later you developed an antagonism to me. In any case, by coming over to me, you are getting too much support. . . ." It was made very clear that Jean, parasite and 'kept woman', was not worth Winifred's notice, and that

Winifred was glad of this opportunity to see the last of her.

They passed Hyde Park Corner and joined the south-bound traffic to the west of Victoria. Buses towered over them, cars glided in circles, neon lighting defined the ceilings of bars. Into the gloom of the station they headed and were lost beneath the vast vault of grey air, under which a crowd milled, and porters, like Pharaoh and his chariots, drove a path for barrows of luggage while the swirling crowds fell back. Bringing the Morris neatly to a standstill beside the taxi rank, Winifred held out a hand. "This is the nearest to Croydon platform." She smiled briefly, looking Jean straight in the eyes. "Good-bye, Mrs. Martin."

"Good-bye," said Jean, and held Winifred's hand for as long as she dared. Winifred's sudden capitulation, for so Jean interpreted the smile, filled her with such profound relief and gratitude that she longed to express her thanks in some tangible way. If it had been feasible—if she had been a child—she would have thrown her arms round Winifred and held her closely. But she was a woman, and Winifred was altogether strange to her. So she made a childish confession—it was uttered on the spur of the moment, and emerged from some deep layer of her mind which had a more realistic knowledge of Winifred than her surface consciousness knew. It was a reckless gesture of trust—a casting of bread upon stormy waters—it was tantamount to saying—"Look, in spite of everything, I trust you and love you, and so I am going to lower my defences; I know you will not hurt me"—it was a last desperate shoring-up of the stricken Madonna image. What she actually said was: "Why I left you really was because we couldn't afford any more fees. You see, with three children, and Carey not earning so much as we expected before he was demobbed, we were getting into debt. And Carey said: 'Ill or not, we can't get into debt. You'll have to let it sweat for a while——' So, you see, I was really obliged to stop my treatment. It wasn't that I wanted to leave you."

Winifred said gravely: "But you could go to a clinic, Mrs. Martin. Then you wouldn't have to pay anything at all. Are there no clinics in South London?"

Jean's eyes widened in astonishment, for she had never considered the possibility of changing her psychiatrist. Confusedly she murmured: "No—— Yes, I suppose so. . . . I'd hate to go to a clinic—all that waiting about for the doctor. . . ."

Winifred smiled again and reached forward to her self-starter. "Well, you'll be all right now, Mrs. Martin. And there's your train, I think. Good-bye. See you don't miss it."

"Good-bye," said Jean, taking what warmth she could from the second in which their eyes met. Then, with her throat contracting painfully, she turned away, stumbled out of the car, closed the door carefully after her, and hurried away without a backward glance to join the anonymous crowd. Lydia's poem lay where it had fallen, at Winifred's feet. . . .

Perhaps Maisie was right, Jean thought, as she sank down into her seat on the train, and pressed the back of her hand against her cheek. Perhaps you got nothing from Dr. Orwin unless you fought for it. Winifred, Maisie said, could deal the direst wounds, then suddenly give way, and her sweetness was as direct and as drastic as her previous cruelty. So far Jean had known nothing of these moods that were, according to Maisie, so characteristic of Winifred. Apparently you had to *fight* her before she gave anything. Like Jacob with the angel, thought Jean, with Sunday School memories rising clear in her mind. For even though she knew the parting was final, she could still feel the thrill in her veins of that last pressure of Winifred's hand. And when her train began to move out, she saw and heard nothing of what went on round her. She kept her hand pressed to her cheek, then slid it along till her lips were touching it. It was the nearest she had ever come to a caress from Winifred, and in her utter desolation she clung to this memory. At the last, when all seemed lost, she had won something more precious than anything that had gone before. In that last contact Winifred had accepted her. It was worth, she thought, the horror of all that Winifred had heaped on her, to have had that last caress.

The effect of Winifred, she thought, was to make one see things clearly. Like a child's seeing: Pictures and symbols, clear-cut and lucid like the pictures in a dream. There was a

dream, life that went on below the level of her daylight actions—at a level where Carey could not follow her, and where even the needs and sorrows of the children could hardly disturb the depth and stillness of the stream of events. Jean, who had lived for thirty-five years without much inclination towards introspection, now let a shutter fall between herself and the multifarious small compulsions that kept her on the move from daybreak to dusk, and was confronted for the first time by herself. Jean Martin. Not Carey's wife, or the boys' mother, or the mistress of a home, or the spectator of an incomprehensible mêlée of figures and unrelated events.

With the profound conviction of illumination, she came to herself, and looked around the carriage with awakened eyes. It was filled, not with suburban travellers on the six-fifty, but with men and women. Every worn-down heel or shiny patch of cloth, every line in the pathetic and sleepy faces of middle-aged women or the Woolworth ear-rings and high ankle-straps of the girl in the corner, became precious as an experience that can never be repeated and must always be treasured. Thus aware for the first time of some intensity that heightened the value of living, Jean arrived at South Croydon and got out on to the platform and walked briskly through the barrier, and was soon turning up the street which led to the bungalow where Carey and the boys awaited her. She could hardly wait to tell Carey all the stupendous events of this extraordinary, tragic, wonderful and bitter evening. 'Oh, Carey,' she would say. 'I've had such a strange and terrible time since I saw you this morning. But it all ended happily. I went up to Harley Street and saw Dr. Orwin. You see, it was like this. I'd found Lydia Bentley's poem. And all at once it came to me what really happened to Lydia. . . . But Dr. Orwin isn't as wicked as I'd thought. If she'd been as wicked as that, I don't think I could have borne to go on living. . . .'

Later that evening, Carey took her on his knee and stroked her hair gently, but did not attempt any further caress, while, with tears brimming in her eyes and her cheek on the rough twed of his jacket, Jean told him about her visit to Dr. Orwin. . . .

This visit to Winifred cost Jean three guineas. The bill came a fortnight later, addressed by Winifred herself in a large, childish hand, written with unusual care, and posted at a time when the quarterly accounts were certainly not due. Winifred was late with her accounts as with everything else. Certainly she had gone out of her way to settle her account with Jean. There was no note enclosed with the bill.

Jean, thinking she would faint, managed to reach a kitchen chair, and sat down at the table and laid her head on her arms. She did not touch the paper. It would have corroded like acid. And indeed Jean in that moment knew that her self-comfort had been a fake. Because she could not bear the truth she had told herself lies. She had pretended that Winifred bore her no ill-will. That they had parted as friends. That with her parting handshake Winifred had cast some warmth on their relationship. Some sincerity. That Winifred did not want to break her heart.

But the bill said: I will not even shake hands with you unless you pay for it. Even my refusal to treat you as a patient shall cost you dearly. I would not touch you or breathe the same air as you, except for a money consideration. We do not share the same human flesh.

With the shock, the remnant of Jean's self-control, precariously built on a few civilised words and one civilised act, gave way. She was utterly without defence. It did not occur to her to dispute the bill. Nor could she ignore it. She did the wisest thing that was open to her under the circumstances. She wrote out a cheque and posted it by return to Harley Street. Then she took Winifred's envelope and put it on the fire. And when the last corner had flamed and scorched away, she collected all previous envelopes and receipts except the last one (which she put into Carey's drawer), and a few notes from Winifred's secretary giving appointments, and burnt them too. When the last vestige of Winifred's handiwork had disappeared, she breathed deeply, murmuring to herself: "At least the house is clean now." But she felt the world was such a wicked place that she could not go on living in it.

There was a pillar-box at the corner of the main street.

Putting out a hand to steady herself, she stumbled through the hall, undid the latch with shaking fingers, and went blindly down the path to the front gate. She saw nothing, but a blind sense of direction guided her feet. She passed a few houses, menacing and impersonal, on her left. Then a car roared by her, and along the main road in front buses flashed, and pedestrians clutched at string bags and paper bags, and dragged little children through the traffic. The noise of Croydon swirled round her ears, creating a pattern on the familiar aural and visual paths that kept her steadily on the pavement till the pillar-box thrust a red lip to receive her letter, while her mind went dark.

It was a darkness to be grateful for. Soon thoughts would come shooting their fiery javelins from all directions, wincing in the raw recesses of her mind that Winifred had unconcernedly laid bare. For the moment she was safe, because excess of pain brings oblivion. There is a limit to the amount of suffering a human organism can stand. Mentally and physically Jean had endured to the limit.

It was a mild and lovely day. The dim blue sky was cloudless. Red villas nestled among gardens white with plum blossom, and glossy-dark with laurels and hedges of escallonia. In Jean's back garden a few white petals still drifted from the knotty branches of the crab-apple, and the leafy clusters of fruit hung green and small as cobnuts. In the benignant atmosphere of the English late spring the violence in Jean's mind crouched like some outrageous and obscene beast. It had to be enchained again, for Jean dared not return to that house of children. Hugh, climbing round his playpen beneath the fiery hawthorn, his cheeks red and smooth like the skin of fruit, was not safe, she thought, and fear caught at her throat. She was glad that the children had not missed her when she returned home. Only Johnny, waiting for his mid-day meal, sitting astride the highest branch of the crab-apple tree, called out to her that he was terribly hungry, that his tummy was caving in. She answered him mechanically, and went through to the kitchen to put on the potatoes. . . .

From then onwards Jean lost the power to sleep. Fighting

all day her agony of mind, she went to bed exhausted and slept fitfully⁶—but after midnight she woke up dreaming of Winifred, and was fighting for her life against a Winifred who was trying to strangle or suffocate her. For hours afterwards she lay in a terror and misery she had not known since childhood, only to fall asleep towards dawn and to wake unrefreshed. Her family doctor kept her supplied with drugs, or she would assuredly have lost her reason. Winifred's threat of the mental hospital seemed likely to be realised in earnest.

Three guineas. . . . Winifred had picked up three guineas unexpectedly at the end of a profitable day's work, and Jean was to pay for it by a nervous breakdown which was to last for the better part of three years. Was it worth it? Many times during the succeeding months Jean asked herself with amazement whether ever money before had been earned at such a price. . . .

There are two gateways from Fear—the gate of Death and the gate of Love. For Jean the alternative to Love was Hatred. But hatred is a kind of Death (the death of the imagination); and a refusal to participate in emotion is another kind of death. To lay bare the affections and to accept equally the gift of love or the stab of hate is the only way to live an un mutilated life. In the end, Jean chose to live, though she often swayed desperately over into the abyss. She sometimes forgot the islands that rise clear of the abyss, and then she remembered them again and reached for them. These islands were her children, who were the future, and the glow that belongs to places and is altogether outside humanity, and, above all, poetry. Poetry was Lydia's legacy, and Jean came to know Lydia more closely now that the physical connection between them was gone. Lydia's mind was now open territory and Jean wandered at will within it. She discovered that her own life had been pretty second-rate. She was deliberately choosing second-rate friends and cheap successes, and closing her heart to beauty. She began to make conscious choice—reaching for the islands; becoming, at last, a person.

When she hated Winifred, because Winifred had humiliated her and mocked at the tenderness she wanted to give, the

abyss opened. When she plotted revenge, or tried to explain mentally to Winifred how her only fault had been a hunger for affection, the abyss threatened to engulf her. The imagery of a religious childhood came to her and peopled the formlessness with jeering devils. There was only one way to cast out the devils, and that was by love. Even Winifred must be understood and explained to herself, and so ultimately become part of the pattern. This was also Lydia's gift. . . .

Jean knew that she was not easy to live with during those agonised, crucial years. Often and often the children received stabs which, through utter weariness or exasperation, she could not withhold, and which were ultimately stimulated by the absent and uncaring Winifred. Jean watched herself deteriorate, and set herself, from the depths of despair and desolation, to create in that home of division some area of serenity. Carey, understanding not much of what was happening to Jean, was very patient with her, and kept alive in both their hearts the earlier beliefs that had carried them through the dangers and sterility of a loveless marriage. In this new-found forbearance with one another they were able to discern faintly the pattern of a new relationship, towards which, during the years to come, they might with growing maturity and more positive hopefulness steadily move. The past was in dissolution and could never be restored. The future might never be achieved. But in the meanwhile, they held on, for in their mediocre and unspectacular fashion they were neither of them without courage. . . .

XXXV

WINIFRED SPENT the following Sunday morning in bed, and had lunch as well as breakfast brought up by Miss Begg. When she finally rose, she slipped a house-coat over her pyjamas and went straight down to her bureau in the lounge to write a letter to Antony.

It was one of those golden summer afternoons which, throughout her life, had marked the crises and catastrophes of Winifred's career, and which never failed to stir in her the melancholy and acrid premonitions of corruption. It being Sunday, Dr. Treherne was expected to tea, and Winifred dreaded the visit. It had come to this at last, that Dr. Treherne must be told she wanted to quit. On the verge of ultimate success, Winifred was through with psychiatry, and Dr. Treherne must look round for another disciple—another successor. The going was too hard, and the price too grievous. Medical women—how often they had shrugged shoulders over this together, and laughed—were always on the defensive. They had joked because they could not altogether believe it, and had expected, for hope is a chronic disease of the human psyche, to be the exceptions to the general fate. And fate had struck back through the most humble and least self-conscious of instruments—a patient who had committed suicide, but who had, by an incredible act of foresight and understanding, left behind her the key to her own deranged and convulsive emotional behaviour. And Lydia had used another equally unselfconscious patient to convey her last message to the one who had sent her to her death. For Winifred had read Lydia's poem, and knew that it had but one interpretation. She could have saved Lydia if only she had cared sufficiently, and she knew, in one blinding, appalling act of recognition, that she had *willed* Lydia to die. For only in Lydia's death could she feel justified at the bar of her own deeply repressed but accusatory conscience. Lydia, living, was a living reproach. Dead, she was the proof that hysterics are worthless individuals, on whom the care and the energy of those who carry the weaker members of the community on their own backs are utterly without justification. But the poem threw all her calculations about Lydia into confusion. Lydia suffered, and came to her for help, and she repulsed her with jeers, and with an absolute refusal to recognise her own share in the psychosis that finally broke through and drove Lydia to the extreme protest. *The prophet had no words—the healer no hands.* . . . There was no need to read the poem again, for already Winifred knew it by

heart. She knew that the poem spoke truth. In the treatment she gave her patients there was dazzlement indeed (did they not all adore her?), but no vision, no integration, no pointing of the way to self-transcendence. For a psychotherapist cannot help a patient beyond the level of his own personality. And she had shrunk from the emotional upheaval and anguish of a treatment in which she herself would be the victim, and which would demand of her the utmost of self-discipline, honesty, ruthlessness, and readiness for fundamental change. A fragment of conversation from the Bedford Square days drifted across her mind. "You function very well as you are," she had told Elizabeth Frayle. "You don't intend to become an analyst. So why, in Heaven's name, undergo all this emotional disturbance just to get a trifle adjusted here and there? In the long run you've changed very little. And look at the waste of time." Dr. Frayle had looked at her oddly. "I don't agree I've changed very little. Anyway, if there's all this emotional upset, it's a proof, isn't it, that I'd very good reason to *fear* change. And therefore, probably, great need of it." Yes, Elizabeth Frayle had accepted the challenge. . . . And Dewey too, though he said very little, had made his attitude clear enough. But she herself had hoped that she could get by, and for this Lydia had paid the price of her life. . . . The Regional Board, viewed from this angle, seemed infinitely trivial, almost comically irrelevant. It was time she went away by herself and faced the truth which she had been evading all these years—faced the problems of herself, and of the urges that had driven her into this most terrible of responsibilities—the problem of WHAT SHE REALLY WAS, and WHAT SHE WAS TRYING TO DO. . . .

Sitting there at her bureau by the open french window, Winifred looked out across the golden enclosure of her walled garden. A lozenge of sunlight, striking full from the south, framed her in a radiant ambiguity. Her house-coat of Wedgwood blue, for she was not yet dressed for Dr. Treherne's visit, was drained of colour like a winter morning. Seen from the angle of the window, she looked so old that few of her patients would have recognised her. Withdrawn from gaiety and spon-

taneity, she sat rigidly upright, the hollows of temples and cheeks pencilled by unfamiliar shadows, her mouth an almost vanished line. In her aloof and brooding abstraction, her wholly unnatural calm, there was something inhuman, almost witch-like, so that in the opposing angle of nostril and jaw, the slots of shadow that lay between the bony ridges of the skull, the dead, unseeing eyes, some quality of livingness had seeped away.

Yet superficially anyone would have said she was a success. Letters from patients to herself were spilling from all the pigeon-holes. The blotter beneath Antony's letter was framed in red morocco—a gift from Maisie. Compressed into one of the open drawers on her left there were photographs and snapshots of patients in whose history she figured as nothing less than a ministering angel. Prominent among these was a recent photograph of little Angela Mainwaring, dressed for the chief part in the school play, *Alice in Wonderland*. She met Winifred's eyes with a gay, enchanting smile, and was wearing, as Mrs. Mainwaring had pointed out, the 'Alice' ribbon which Winifred had given her in a moment of pure and impulsive affection—an affection that had carried the child from a dangerous negativism and hostility to a delightful friendliness and ability both to give love and to receive it. Among the snapshots was an enlargement of Doreen arm-in-arm with her young man, with whom she was now 'walking out' officially, though not yet engaged; Mr. Hammond's religious objections were not expected to hold out much longer against Dr. Orwin's considered approval.

But Winifred, for once, took no pleasure in these visible signs of her professional and financial successes. This accidental therapy was no longer good enough. Angela and Doreen, Miss Macmillan and Maisie, and other patients equally young or immature as they were, after all, uncomplicated cases who responded readily enough to the stock phrases and the routine treatments. They fell for the whole bag of tricks, once one had mastered the text-books. But Lydia, with her wide and startled eyes, and her habit of escaping into some more impersonal region where the tricks of the text-books looked a bit shabby

and second-rate—Lydia was different. She had died from aspirin poisoning. Or she might have died some other death—fallen from some cliff, been crushed by some passing vehicle, or drowned, as Ophelia was drowned, dreaming of flowers. All deaths were the same death, and Winifred, to whom the dissolution of the body was such a commonplace that she could rise from any death-bed untouched by any sense of wonder or foreboding, knew no words adequately to express to herself that this horror was contemporary and true. Fantastic images of Lydia crowded through her mind—of Lydia's hands frantically clutching some thread of seaweed or the drifting scrap of a child's lost boat, while the sea churned and rotted mighty wrecks, and submerged forests, and the flotsam of coasts and cities. . . . For Lydia's death was the death of all pilgrims who somehow, somewhere, on their journey to the Celestial City have lost their bearings, and whom the underworld floods have risen to overwhelm and silence for ever. And Winifred could have saved Lydia. Could have saved her by a word, a single gesture of compassion, by merely stretching out a hand. . . .

Outside in the garden, yellow ramblers in full bloom hid the pergola. Lilies, shadowy below the boundary of the elm trees, laid bare their creamy calyxes to the sprinkled sunlight. On the east wall the polygonum, flowering for the first time this summer, was already foaming over into her neighbour's garden. Summer, she remembered, had always been the cruellest of the seasons. Every shock, every disaster, the treachery of love and the betrayal of tenderness, had been accompanied by this flawless and innocent weather, when the sun shone, and the slender elms moved so lightly that the whole world seemed to sway in one movement with the windless air.

Looking back, she saw her life as a series of blurred and golden days, streaming away into an infinity of forgotten summers. She thought of her childhood, and of the church bathed in a golden glow on that evening when Dorothy sang 'The King of Love', framed in the radiance, misty with golden dust, that fell, diffused, from the gold west window. How proud her father was of Dorothy that evening, when the stupid

couple, mother and daughter, praised her as they sat at supper, hiding their furtive malice under a smooth patronage that no one except Winifred seemed to understand. . . . And later there was Antony, wide-eyed with horror when she smashed the doll on the drawing-room veranda, and sobbing beneath the blankets while she offered him her pocket-money for months and months if he would only keep her secret. She remembered the love and the hatred that for ever flared between them. All her life she had hated Sunday evenings. . . .

And the summer days were endless, when they played together in the rectory garden. The light breeze would lift Dorothy's fair curls as they climbed over the gate into the meadow where the big horses grazed, and her blue eyes shone with that secret and remote excitement that could allow the bruising contacts of their daily life to fall off, almost unnoticed, which to Winifred were major catastrophes. She remembered her father, fussing over parishioners, and striding out across the fields in his worn cassock to save the souls of hard-pressed farmers' wives, who would dive into any handy shed or hen-roost as he hove into sight, full of zeal and the will of God. . . .

Every shock, every disaster, had for its background this golden summer weather, until it seemed as if almost sunlight itself was an obscene and horrible thing. There was the sunset on that evening of nearly forty years ago when she dedicated her life to the interpretation of music. And sunlight, shining on Campden Hill, illumined the enormous frame of Stewart Lockwood as he talked to her, incongruously, about the right way to prepare omelettes, and banished her for ever from the esoteric preoccupation with art which would have brought her to serenity. It was on a cloudless summer day that she turned when they reached the gate in the field, and saw the appeal in Clifford's eyes, and knew that he loved her. And before the London summer had parched to autumn, she knew that it was not real—that it never had been real.

When time is not felt to pass, it remains as one time, and this golden afternoon by her window in Hampstead differed in no way from that London morning of thirty years ago when the telephone, that should have brought to her Clifford's

beloved voice, shrilled on in his empty room, and Winifred guessed that never of his own will would he answer her again. The blankness, the anguish, were of the past—wholly forgotten; but she remembered the heat of the paving-stone beneath her feet, and the passing crowds with their unconscious hostility that jostled her as she stood outside the telephone kiosk in Euston Road. Blank and brutal masks, the tide flowed past her, while the tall buildings reeled and for a moment that felt like eternity were held in reverse; so that for ever afterwards Euston Road, and the white façade of the Friends' Meeting House, and the narrow, distant warehouses, and the suggestion of infinite darkness beyond the arch of the station, lived on in her mind like a glimpse into an inferno. . . .

And so she turned to medicine. Her life—she could admit it, though no longer with the tension of excitement or pleasure—was a success story. After she took her Finals, and before the results came through, Dr. Treherne accompanied her for the second time to Switzerland. They stayed in a mountain village above Interlaken, and every day she enquired of the hotel clerk whether a telegram had come through for her from London. They were sitting on the glass-covered terrace after dinner when the wire arrived. The villages below her in the valley were drowned in darkness, and only the snowy peaks of the Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau still glowed ruby against the deepening sky. In this strange setting, it seemed natural that her life henceforth should be set apart, like that of a nun or priestess—sexless, immune. No longer would she be troubled by the amber robes of saints, for ever static in the west window, and shedding on Dorothy, and Dorothy alone, their placid and benign irradiation. It was an ugly window really, and only memorable because she admired it so passionately as a child. From now on the past would cease to matter. She read her telegram aloud to Dr. Treherne, and together they planned the next step in her career—the Diploma in Psychological Medicine—listening to the wind among the pine trees above St. Beatenberg. . . .

She had travelled so far, only to find herself back at the

beginning. She unscrewed her fountain-pen, searched for a sheet of clean notepaper, and wrote a letter to Antony. She was displeased with her first attempt, and rewrote it several times before she achieved the right note between detachment and cordiality. At last it sounded right to her, and she read it aloud slowly, as she had once read aloud to Dr. Treherne the telegram that made her a doctor.

"MY DEAR ANTONY,

"Your charming letter, dated 17th last month, arrived on a particularly drab and unpleasant morning. Being quite fast in the routine, I cannot quite believe that in a few weeks' time I may be free of responsibility for other people, and on my way to you, and unrestricted sunlight, and the first real leisure I have had since I qualified as a doctor. Here our English summer is, as always, a succession of sunny days working towards thunder, and with a mackintosh over my arm and gripping an ancient umbrella, I pick my way like a cat through the crowds of the West End. How glad I shall be to see the last of them for a time.

"I made up my mind very suddenly to waste no more time, but to accept your delightful invitation right away. My application for a passage went off yesterday. This week I shall advertise for a locum. If all's well, I should be with you by the middle of August. c

"Dorothy envies me my escape from this country, and would like, I am sure, to accompany me, but nothing short of a revolution would shift dear old Charles from the Grange. Talking of revolution, we have one on here, but it is gradual, and I do not think we shall realise the full horror of it in time to do anything to stop it. Mother's health continues only partially satisfactory. I am arranging for her to go into a nursing-home if she should have an attack while I am away. Meanwhile she is happy enough at the villa, and at the moment of writing has a good housekeeper.

"The snapshots of Phyllis with my niece and nephew are most attractive. How well they look, and how much I am

looking forward to seeing you all again. Give them my love, won't you, and tell them I hope to be with them soon.

"Ever your affectionate sister,
"WINIFRED."

XXXVI

THE CUCKOO clock on the dining-room wall struck three. Any moment now Dr. Treherne would be at the door, and Winifred was still not changed for the afternoon. She folded her letter to Antony and slipped it, without re-reading it, into an envelope. When she had stamped it she carried it through to the hall and propped it by the telephone. It was going to be hard to break her news to Dr. Treherne, and there would no doubt be much argument and ejaculation before she could convince the old woman that she could not wait in England any longer. But if she didn't tell her right away, Dr. Treherne might hear the news from others, and then it would be more difficult than ever.

Her bedroom, when she opened the door, intimidated even Winifred by its disorder. She must have known for some time past that she would soon be quitting—all the time, in fact, that she had been assuring Dr. Treherne and herself that the Regional Board was the first consideration—for she had been buying clothes against her departure for several weeks past. Summer frocks and pastel-coloured coats were packed tight in the Georgian press. A happy emerald top-coat, that she could not wear till she was clear of Hampstead and Harley Street, was draped over the chair. Hats, delicate and cool, which would shade her tired eyes from the vivid sunlight of Australia, occupied two shelves behind a chintz curtain in a recess. Miss Begg had made her bed and straightened the dressing-table as well as she could, but handbags and wallets, cigarette-cases and magazines, lipsticks and cosmetic cases,

littered every flat surface and were crammed, she knelt into every drawer.

Her bedroom faced south overlooking the back garden. Clear afternoon light paled the eggshell walls, and sharpened the black woodwork and the Georgian oak hanging-cupboard. She was seeing them already as if they belonged to the past—the pale-green tiles of the fireplace and the green cover on the bed; the rush fireside chair and the tiny pattern of the carpet; the bowl of waxed flowers and the white pottery jugs on the mantelpiece; the Swiss scene on the wall, with its marguerites and snowy mountains; the wooden bears from Lucerne, and the trinket-case from Norway. Thumb your way through the chapters, she thought, and you would see the whole outfit. Presents from Dr. Treherne, presents from patients; even her hair-brushes, ivory with a thin gold border, were a twenty-first birthday present from Dorothy. Winifred cleared some newspapers from a chair and sat down, closing her eyes on past and present. Her head ached, and this was no way to prepare for Dr. Treherne's visit. The clothes—the wonderful holiday clothes—could be sorted later. Sorting clothes would be as good a way as any other of spending Sunday evening. She took a benzedrine tablet from the pocket of her house-coat and slipped it into her mouth.

There was a timid knock on the door. "Come in."

"I made you a fresh cup of coffee, doctor." Miss Begg, sweating as usual from anxiety to please and bending over the sink, edged her red face round the door. "You've had such a busy afternoon."

Winifred nodded to the one disengaged table and admitted she could do with a cup.

"Oh dear," sighed Miss Begg, eyes popping from sugar to milk-jug, and back to the doctor's white and rigid face. "I'm so sorry you've got to have a visitor this afternoon. You're that tired. You could 'ave done with a good rest."

"I wasn't aware I was tired," said Winifred patiently, sniffing at the coffee. "I spent the whole morning in bed."

"You could 'ave done with the whole Sunday in bed."

"Give me two lumps, please."

The housekeeper, perturbed, shifted the coffee-table nearer to Winifred's elbow. "You'll be having tea on the veranda, I expect?"

"I don't know." Winifred enjoyed the little ceremony of coffee, the sparkle of silver on the bubbling percolator, the feel of the fluted, gold-handled cup—but Miss Begg's sympathy rasped her nerves. To-day of all days she felt she could do with no more of it. She was glad to hear Miss Begg descend to the kitchen.

The long mirror, tilting up at her, showed her irresolute, her large, capable hands fidgeting among the china. "Who cares what I wear?" she asked suddenly of the empty air, and stood up, letting the Wedgwood house-coat slip from her shoulders. It fell softly round her ankles and she kicked it back impatiently while her fingers brushed over the hangers in her cupboard. She always dressed formally for Dr. Treherne's visits, and to-day she felt a special need to wear something non-committal and mature, but she could not bring herself to make a choice. "Who cares anyway?" she said roughly, and jerked off a bright green dress that made her skin look ghastly. Hastily she caught up a box of rouge, and slapped some colour along her cheek-bones, rubbing it down into the hollows above her jaw. Dr. Treherne would notice something was wrong, but what would it matter? Dr. Treherne was finished—forgotten, like all old doctors when the public couldn't use them any more.

Miss Begg, lifting hot scones from the oven, sighed her relief as she heard Winifred's high heels dragging out on to the veranda a few minutes later. What with Dr. Orwin's long lie on Sundays, and home-made cakes for tea, and that Dr. Treherne coming so regular, not to mention other visitors sometimes as well, Sunday was one rush, and no mistake. She pushed a skewer into one of the scones and it came out clean. As she lumbered out into the hall to fetch the tea wagon, she heard the impatient fumbling of Dr. Treherne's hand on the garden gate.

"I've got news from the Ministry!" shouted Dr. Treherne as she wiped her feet on the front door-mat. "Winifred! Winifred!"

Where are you? Come and relieve me of all this junk and let me sit down, for Heaven's sake. Winifred! . . . Ah, there you are, my dear——" For Winifred appeared at the french window, a dark shape against the sunlit garden, her hollow cheeks veiled from Dr. Treherne's affectionate but penetrating gaze, and steadying herself by her firm grip on the jamb of the door which swung open across the veranda. "No, don't you bother, Miss Begg," said Dr. Treherne kindly. "You're very good . . . very good indeed. But Dr. Orwin will look after me. Go on, Winifred. Instal me in that comfortable chair of yours, and then listen for all you're worth. Ah—that's better." Dr. Treherne lowered herself carefully into the arm-chair and allowed Winifred to pad her back with cushions. "Bother this rheumatism!" she said parenthetically, rubbing her hip. "I ought not to have rushed up the path like I did. It's disgraceful at my age. But I suppose I never shall learn sense now. I'm past it."

"You were always younger than any of us," murmured Winifred automatically, still more than a little confused by the irruption of the beaming, irrepressible Dr. Treherne on a scene which, until a few minutes previously, had witnessed her renunciation of an arrogance no longer tenable. She sat down in the chair opposite Dr. Treherne and leant her aching head on her hand, staring at the green carpet.

"That's a lie, and you know it," said Dr. Treherne happily. "Listen, my dear. The Regional Board appointments are settled. Some of them anyway. And it's you they've chosen to represent the mental side. Not Dewey. Of course, nothing's settled yet. But my cousin at the Ministry lunched with me to-day and told me what he knew. I asked him, naturally. And he doesn't think it matters if I pass it on, so long as you know it's still unofficial. . . . Well, Winifred? Say something. Aren't you pleased? Well, of course you're pleased. It's almost *too* overwhelming, isn't it?"

Winifred's expression was unreadable, but she tried to smile as she lifted her haggard face to Dr. Treherne's tender and triumphant scrutiny. The crystal clock ticked gently above the pale green mantelpiece, and a shaft of sunlight diamonded the

polished hearth, where a jar of late flowering chestnut, picked by Maisie, reminded her that patients could impinge on her security even in Hampstead.

"You *are* pleased, aren't you, my dear?"

"Oh yes, I'm delighted," said Winifred faintly, and searched for words that would do justice to Dr. Treherne's enormous contentment. "I—yes, of course, I'm delighted. It's just— Well, it came rather unexpectedly at the end, don't you think? After all these months——"

A little dashed, Dr. Treherne remarked: "It's a pity you won't be able to go abroad after all, but you'll get a change of work, and that's the main thing. I'm sorry for Dewey's sake, but it was quite essential we should have a woman on the Board——"

"That seems to be settled, then," murmured Winifred, pressing her cold palm over one closed eye, for pain, throbbing in one temple, warned her that unless she could manage to relax she would be in the grip of torturing headache. She was glad that Dr. Treherne could not see her face clearly. The ghastly brightness of the summer garden, spilling over and flowing along her gleaming carpet, and flaring up the empty walls of her austere, expensive room, was an affliction to her senses, so that she longed for the night, for isolation, for an escape from the love of this terrible old woman who knew so much and understood nothing. I must take aspirin with my tea, she thought, and drew back in horror, as if she had touched some vile, incomprehensible obscenity. No, a sedative would be better—two grains of sodium amytal to steady her nerves, and there was no need, on such a day, to be conversational with Dr. Treherne, who was elated enough to supply small talk for them both. . . .

"I'll go and tell Miss Begg to bring in tea. . . ."

They were silent as Miss Begg lifted the wagon over the doormat and drew it across the carpet for Winifred to pour out. There were scones hot from the oven, several kinds of home-made cakes, bowls of raspberries from the garden, and a dish of *petit-fours* from Barker's—the gift of a patient.

Dr. Treherne unwound the chiffon scarf from her throat and

pulled off her gloves. "And how are you?" she enquired, looking closely at Winifred for the first time. "I ought to have asked you when I came in, instead of charging off on my hobby-horse like that. No, don't get up. I'll leave my things on the chair."

"I'm feeling much better," Winifred was able to assure her, as she lifted the heavy silver tea-pot. "I haven't been just too well lately. . . . But you know how it is——"

"You need a holiday," pronounced Dr. Treherne, with some concern. "You're like the rest of us, my dear. When there's work to be done, you never have the sense to spare yourself. . . ."

Winifred smiled, and filled up the tea-cups, and handed her friend one of the plates delicately bordered with wild strawberries and their pointed, intertwining leaves. "Yes. . . . I might go to Mother's for a fortnight. She'll be glad to have me. It's a good thing I never bothered her with my plans for Australia——"

"A week or two on the Continent would do you more good."

"I might go to Switzerland——"

After tea Winifred accompanied her friend to the garden gate. The lavender hedge rose to meet them with a mist of perfume. The street lay cool and shadowed, and Dr. Treherne's taxi was at the kerb, waiting to carry the old woman home from her scene of triumph. "It will be fine again to-morrow," remarked Dr. Treherne complacently, looking up at the clear evening sky.

"I shall ring you during the week——"

Dr. Treherne took Winifred's hand in her own and gave it a squeeze. "This is the happiest day of my life, Winifred, my dear." She grinned apologetically, her eyes dazzling and darkly warm in her brown and homely face. "I'm very proud." She released Winifred's hand and sighed. "There. I won't say any more. You hate fuss as much as I do. But I had to say it just once."

"It's the happiest day in my life too," said Winifred with difficulty, and was glad for the interruption of the taxi-driver, who opened the door while she pushed his exultant passenger

up into the interior of the car. With a final wave of the hand and a congratulatory smile, Dr. Treherne was gone. . .

With her parting, the air felt curiously cold. Winifred shivered, hugging her arms across her breast, and hurried back into the house, and out through the lounge on to her veranda, where the hammock in its iron frame lay hot and still in the evening sun. She sat down slowly, and stared at her jewelled garden, where an expensive artlessness had so cleverly created an illusion of distance. She did not yet feel safe, but was conscious of a new liberation that might culminate in security. Yellow roses drooped from the pergola and small blue butterflies zig-zagged over the herbaceous border below the east wall, now hidden beneath the purple stars of clematis and the creamy foam of polygonum. Under the arch of the pergola the syringa clusters were a blur of moonlight in the surrounding darkness.

Gradually the implications of her power-to-be took on solidity and the outline of the familiar. She was to be a member of the Regional Board which would frame policy and enforce decisions. She would give orders to her colleagues—Elizabeth Frayle, for instance, or even Dewey—and her orders would be obeyed. She would be in an unassailable position—a position of dignity, of security, of power. . . . What had Dorothy to show beside this—Dorothy, grubbing along at the Grange, without servants, and disappointed in her mediocre children? What more had Clifford done, who had the world at his feet, and a wife to cushion every hardship and mitigate every distress?

It was a golden evening. All the important things of her life had come to her on such an evening as this. It was fitting that the evening sunlight should fall so gently into her enclosed garden, while she sat, hardly daring to breathe, but conscious of a future in which she might yet achieve still greater distinction—a future in which no one would have the power to hurt her any more. . . .

